

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

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AUGUST 35c

Thomas Walsh

Ed Mahoney's Boy

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Malone and the Missing Weapon

Frances & Richard Lockridge

The Accusing Smoke

Harold R. Daniels

The Haunted Woodshed

Robert L. Fish

The Missing Cheyne-Stroke

Robert Wallsten

The Children of Alda Nuova

Berkely Mather

Cri de Coeur

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

Printed in 7 editions—American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

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a new story by

AUTHOR: HELEN NIELSEN

TITLE: *Cop's Day Off*

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Sam Ward

LOCALE: Los Angeles, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Sam Ward was a dedicated cop. He worked all the time, never relaxed—even on his days off. But he had his reasons . . .*

SAM WARD HAD WORKED HARD FOR the Detective Lieutenant's badge in his pocket, and he never stopped working. That was the mystery around headquarters—what made Sammy run so hard?

He didn't seem particularly ambitious. He wasn't prodding Captain Norton for his job, or aspiring to a place on the D.A.'s staff; and he'd never been a glory boy looking for headlines. He was just a cop who worked hard. He never stopped, he never relaxed, he seldom smiled.

"Sam," Captain Norton said, "what are you doing down here today? Isn't this supposed to be your day off?"

Sam, who was thirty-six, but appeared older because of the pinched lines about his eyes and mouth, looked up from his desk with an almost guilty cringe.

"I'm just running through some of the unsolved files," he said.

"Well, stop running through them," the Captain snapped. "You look terrible. You've got bags under your eyes, and your skin's the color of old library paste. I want you out of here. Ray, take Sam with you."

Ray Moreno had the same kind of badge in his pocket, but he'd come by it with less strain. His face could still smile—wide, with the white teeth flashing.

"I'm meeting my wife at the airport, Captain. She's coming in from Mexico City."

"Okay. So take Sam down to meet your wife. Or drop him off at the ball park. Do something. I'm getting tired of seeing him in here every day. You'd think a married man might at least have a lawn to mow."

When the Captain was in that kind of mood there was only one thing to do about it. Sam got up from his desk and followed Moreno outside. It was a nice day—clear, no haze, with a fair wind blowing in off the ocean that would grow stronger as they drove south.

"Don't let the Captain burn you," Moreno said. "He rides me, too. But this time, he's right. The taxpayers aren't going to remember you one day longer if you kill yourself on the job."

Sam stared out of the window and said nothing. It was the best way he knew to change the subject of an unwanted conversation and it worked. Moreno went on.

"I know what I'm going to find at that airport—a basket full of bottles. Every time my wife flies down to visit her family, she comes back with another one, of those hand-woven baskets full of bottles from the glass-blowing factory. Blue bottles, brown bottles, purple bottles—the house is so full of them now that I've been threatening to add another wing. Does your wife collect anything, Sam?"

There was the old standard reply, "Nothing but my pay check," but Sam didn't give it. "No, she doesn't," he said.

"You're a lucky man," Moreno said. "When a woman gets started collecting something there's just no—hey, what's going on up there? Looks like somebody's hurt."

Moreno disliked the Freeway. He'd turned off on a side street—one of the numerous short cuts he knew so well—and now, sliding up over a small rise, they were suddenly in the midst of a mob scene in the middle of the street. Moreno touched the siren button to clear passage and wheeled the sedan to the curb. By this time they could see a tiny form lying in the street. Moreno had his door open before he cut the motor. Even so, Sam beat him to the spot.

The victim was a child—a seven- or eight-year-old girl. She had been struck down by an auto—that was obvious even before the volunteered information erupted from the spectators. She was unconscious. No visible wounds but possible internal injuries. Kneeling beside the child, a panic-stricken woman clenched her own hands together to keep them from reaching out to the victim.

"Don't move her," someone called out from the crowd. "She may have a broken neck."

"Oh, Kathy—"

Moreno knelt beside the woman.

"That's right, lady," he said. "You mustn't move her. Has anyone called for an ambulance?"

"I did," a man said.

The voice was deep and commanding. Sam, who now stood beside Moreno, was forced to turn his eyes away from the child. It was an old man who had spoken the words—tall, white-haired, majestic in appearance. He wore a loose fitting sweater coat, baggy trousers, and heavy felt slippers on his feet; but there was an authority about him that commanded instant attention.

"I called for the ambulance and the police as soon as I saw it happen," he said. "You came a lot faster than I expected."

"We didn't come in answer to the call," Moreno explained. "We were just passing by."

"That explains it," the man said. "I'm getting too old to stand the shock of seeing the public served by its employees."

Moreno stood up. "The public's employees are spread pretty thin in a growing city," he said. He whipped out a notebook and a pencil. "What's your name, sir?" he asked.

The old man lost a shade of majesty.

"Just because I made a remark about public employees—"

"Forget it," Moreno said. "Everybody makes remarks about public employees. We'd feel neglected if they didn't. I want your name be-

cause you said that you saw what happened here."

"Oh. Yes, sir. Yes, sir, I did. My name's Max Schiller. I live right across the street—that's my house with the rocker on the front porch. Ask anyone around here—they'll tell you who I am."

With a murmur of assent behind him, Moreno made note of Schiller's name and address.

"And you, lady?"

When the woman who had knelt beside the child tried to rise, Sam stepped forward and helped her to her feet. She was light—a small woman and young. Not over twenty-five, Sam guessed. She trembled slightly against his arm.

"Sally Grossman," she said. "I live here." She nodded at the house behind Moreno's shoulder. "But Kathy isn't my child. She's Kathy Lambert. She lives down in the corner house. Her parents are divorced. Her mother works. Kathy ran out into the street after Susie—that's her cat, her Siamese cat." Suddenly fear leaped into her eyes.

"Bobby—?" she called. "Where's Bobby?"

"I'm here, Mom."

A boy wriggled through the crowd to reach his mother. He was possibly ten—thin and awkward in his tee shirt and denims. The woman's hands grasped his shoulders protectively and he grimaced in disgust.

"I came out to call Bobby," Mrs.

Grossman continued, "and I saw Kathy up the street playing with her cat. She's such a sweet girl and alone so much. The cat is a companion to her. Then, all of a sudden, Susie jumped out of Kathy's arms and darted across the street. I think Kathy must have seen the car coming and was afraid for Susie. She ran after her. I screamed and Kathy went down in front of the car. I think I screamed." The woman looked about for confirmation. "Somebody screamed—I think it was me."

"What kind of car was it?" Moreno asked.

"Car?" Mrs. Grossman seemed helpless.

"A '59 Impala convertible," Bobby Grossman announced loudly. "Pale blue—"

"Bobby, be quiet," his mother ordered. "That's all he talks about, Officer. He wants his father to buy a blue Impala convertible. As for the car that struck poor Kathy—oh, I don't know. It happened so fast and all I could think of was the child."

"The driver didn't stop?"

"Oh, no! That's what makes it all so horrible. The car just kept right on going."

Moreno turned to Max Schiller, who stood all this time like a prophet waiting to be called for testimony. Before the question could be asked he said, "It was a sedan. A big, gray sedan. A Buick. Not a new one—six, seven years

old, maybe. I sat there on my porch across the street and watched him come up over the rise. He never slacked speed—never thought about a child playing in the street."

"He?" Moreno echoed. "Are you sure it was a man?"

"Look," Schiller said. "Do you see that delivery truck backing out of the driveway three doors down? What's the lettering on the side of it?"

Moreno was puzzled. Sam followed the direction of his gaze. A truck was pulling out of a driveway, but it was old and unwashed. The lettering was indistinct.

"Ralph's TV Repair Service," the old man read aloud. "Call MA 6-078—Oops, there he goes and I missed the last number. And that's without glasses. Seventy-two years old and no glasses. Ask anyone around here."

"That's true," Mrs. Grossman volunteered. "Mr. Schiller reads the finest print—the Bible, even, without glasses. If he says it was a Buick—"

"It was an Impala," Bobby protested.

"A gray Buick," Schiller repeated, "driven by a man. A young man. They think of nothing but themselves, these young men. They don't care how many children they kill—"

The sound of the ambulance siren cut off Schiller's commentary. The crowd fanned out and flattened against the curb. Grim men

had grim work to do. Moments later, a police car arrived. By this time Moreno had the story organized.

They could get out an immediate alert for a gray Buick sedan, six or seven years old, driven by a young man. It would show signs of an accident—the impact had been hard and there were fragments of glass on the street. Moreno was ready to continue to the airport.

"Go ahead," Sam said, "I'm too late for the ball game now. I'll go back in the other car."

"The Captain won't be happy to see you," Moreno cautioned.

"He can look the other way," Sam answered.

Moreno drove away and Sam waited on the curb until the ambulance had gone. The questioning over, old Max Schiller ambled across the street and sat down in his rocking chair. He looked like a white-crowned eagle on self-imposed sentry duty over the street. Mrs. Grossman, Bobby in tow, started back to her own house.

"Does he always sit like that?" Sam asked.

"Mr. Schiller?" The woman paused and looked back over her shoulder. "Yes, most of the time," she said.

"Ever since Johnny ran off with that old woman," Bobby piped.

"Bobby! You get into the house this instant! Scoot, now!" A slap on the rear sent Bobby on his way, but not soon enough.

"Johnny," Sam repeated. "Who is Johnny?"

"Old Mr. Schiller's grandson."

"And he ran away?"

"Yes, about four months ago. He'd been keeping company with an older woman. It upset the old man, naturally. Johnny's parents were killed when he was a child. Johnny was all Mr. Schiller had."

"So that's why he sits on the front porch," Sam mused. "Johnny—"

It was all in the Missing Persons file—among the unclosed cases.

John Schiller—20. White. Dark brown hair. Gray eyes. Height—5'-9". Weight—140 pounds. Distinguishing marks: anchor and coiled serpent tattooed on right forearm. Believed to have eloped with Sandy Downes, sometimes known as Andrea Dawn, entertainer. Schiller has served one hitch in the navy. Radio technician. Has worked as drummer in night clubs, gas station attendant, radio repair man. Believed to have gone to Las Vegas.

The report was accompanied by a photograph of a dark-haired, good-looking young man in the uniform of an apprentice seaman. In spite of his youth, John Schiller had very solemn, searching eyes. A woman would consider them romantic.

That was all. There was no indication of any investigation or subsequent reports. The case was dated nearly six months past—Mrs.

Grossman had been a little off in her memory. Sam Ward studied the file for a few minutes and then went to Captain Norton.

"I thought I told you to go to a ball game," Norton admonished.

"I was with Moreno when he came across the hit-and-run," Sam explained. "The Lambert girl."

Norton's face darkened. "I just heard from the hospital. She's in a critical condition. If she dies, it means a manslaughter charge."

"Against a young man driving a gray Buick sedan," Sam said.

It was the way he said it that caused Norton to look at him in a listening way. Sam Ward wasn't a great talker. When he did talk, it meant that something was on his mind.

"What do you want?" Norton asked.

Sam handed him the file.

"I want to look for John Schiller," he said.

"Any particular reason?"

Sam hesitated. "Call it a hunch," he said.

"All right," Norton sighed. "If that's what you'd rather do than go to a ball game, go ahead. It's your day off."

The trouble with missing person cases, was that there were too many of them. If John Schiller had been a minor—a teenage girl, for example—more of a search would have been made. But he wasn't a minor, and he'd committed no crime except to break an old man's heart.

In this case, a call to the Las Vegas police for a check of the marriage mills would have covered the situation.

But when a grown man and woman went off together, it didn't necessarily mean Las Vegas. One thing was certain: in nearly six months' time, two people had to eat. John Schiller hadn't come from a fashionable neighborhood—there was no reason to believe he'd gone off with a bankroll. And who was this Sandy Downes—or Andrea Dawn? An entertainer, the report said. But no one Sam had ever heard of. Entertainers weren't exactly a scarcity in Los Angeles; but if an entertainer worked, she had to be registered somewhere.

Sam spent the next half hour on the telephone and came up with the information that Sandy Downes, a singer, had last been booked at the Blue Pussycat, a night club in Santa Monica. Sam put on his hat and started traveling.

The Blue Pussycat was as uninviting in mid-afternoon as any similar establishment. It was a place designed for the lower echelon trade. The bar was open but deserted, except for a bartender and one customer who appeared to be a permanent fixture. Sam flashed his badge and was directed to the owner, who was in his office with his tax accountant.

"My master," the owner explained. "In the old days, Lieutenant, a man with no education ex-

cept from the school of hard knocks could take a few dollars, plus a lot of guts, and make out in this world; but those days are gone forever. Sit down and have a cigar, Lieutenant. And, Roger, be sure and make a note—one cigar in the deductions for good will."

Roger was a neatly dressed young man with an Ivy League haircut and heavy, black-rimmed glasses. He seemed completely humorless. By contrast, the owner, whose name was Mike Adamic, was in shirt sleeves, had no hair except a gray shadow circling above his ears, and laughed as easily as a man who's about to lose his last dollar. When Sam stated his mission, Adamic's forced joviality faded.

"Sandy?" he said. "Sure, I remember her. I've booked Sandy in and out ever since she was a kid. She had plenty of spark in those days. This last engagement was pitiful. I wanted to cancel after the first week, but what can you do? If I didn't have such a big heart, Roger wouldn't have me handcuffed. I let her stay the full six weeks—just for old times' sake."

"When was that?" Sam asked.

Adamic turned to Roger. "Tell the lieutenant when," he said.

"Last name?" Roger queried.

Adamic grinned up at Sam. "You see? Just like Univac. The last name, Roger, is Downes. Sandy Downes."

Roger picked up a ledger from

the stack on the desk and thumbed through it until his index finger came to rest under a certain notation.

"Downes, Sandy," he read aloud. "April 7, '59 through May 12, '59. Salary—\$200 per week. Total paid out: \$1200, less federal income tax and unemployment insurance."

"Beautiful," Adamic said.

"April to May," Sam mused.

"That makes it almost six months since she terminated. Tell me, Mr. Adamic, was Miss Downes keeping company with anyone at the time she worked here?"

Adamic raised his eyebrows. "Lieutenant, I'm not a chaperon—" he began. But by this time Sam had pulled the photograph of John Schiller out of his coat pocket, and at the sight of it Adamic's expression changed.

"Sure, I remember. The kid," he said. "Johnny something-or-other. What's wrong, Lieutenant, is he in trouble?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Sam said.

He stayed just long enough to get Sandy Downes's address when she was employed at the Blue Pusycat, plus a publicity still which showed what happened to a once lovely blonde who had stood under the spotlights and listened to the loud music a little too long. Her smile already had a trace of hardness, and the retoucher couldn't take the disillusionment out of her eyes. She was at the stage where

she needed the love of youth, and John Schiller was an orphan looking for his mother.

The address was that of a fashionable apartment hotel fronting on the ocean, and the story was short and sad. Sandy Downes had lived there until three months ago, only to leave suddenly, owing to the embarrassing inability to pay her rent. She had left no forwarding address, and a considerable amount of mail had accumulated consisting chiefly of inquiries from skip-tracers.

"Her brother was with her most of the time she was here," the manager concluded. "He left no forwarding address, either."

"Her brother?" Sam brought out the photo of John Schiller and handed it to the manager.

"Yes, that's the young man. Nice looking—but you can't tell by faces, can you?"

"You can't tell by faces," Sam agreed.

As Sam prepared to leave the building, the afternoon papers were delivered to the foyer. He paused to read the front page. The Kathy Lambert story was in it. Her condition was still critical—she had yet to regain consciousness. The police were searching for a gray Buick sedan as described by an eyewitness.

Sam scanned the story quickly and put the paper aside. He was still searching for two people who had to eat.

Mike Adamic's human Univac

had noted two deductions from Sandy Downes's salary. The federal government didn't give out information; but the California Department of Employment was more cooperative. Sam consulted a telephone directory for the location of the local branch and continued his search.

Beyond the multiple lines of weary humanity edging toward the cashiers' windows were offices; and inside one of the offices was another human Univac—Sam was struck by how little they differed from one another in appearance—who, in due time, divulged that the department had no Sandy Downes listed among its clientele. But it did have an Andrea Dawn.

"Currently collecting?" Sam asked.

"Currently," he was told. "But not for long. She has only three weeks compensation still due her."

"And when does she receive the next payment?"

"Are you familiar with Miss Down's—or Downes's—appearance, Lieutenant?"

"I have her photograph," Sam said.

"Then, if you're not too late or she's not too early, you should be able to spot her in the lineup at window four. I'll check with the cashier—"

Sam didn't wait for more. Outside the office, the lines of weary humanity now became individuals with faces and bodies. Sometimes

luck was with you; sometimes it wasn't. It hadn't been with Kathy Lambert; but it was with Sam when he took a spectator's position in view of window four.

It was getting late in the afternoon; the line was short. He hadn't long to wait before a tall, blonde woman marched through the front doors and headed toward the window. Even without the publicity photo he would have recognized Sandy Downes. Faded she might be, but she still made the others in the room look dowdy by comparison. Her Capri pants were skintight; her blouse was blazing red; and her blonde head tossed back like a startled colt when he stepped forward and called her by name.

"Miss Downes—"

She didn't speak. She gave him one penetrating stare and reached an immediate decision. The decision was to leave—suddenly.

She wheeled past him and hurried toward the side exit. The few seconds in timing that her move cost Sam were enough. By the time he reached the street she was climbing into a car waiting at the curb. He caught a glimpse of the blazing red blouse before the vehicle swung out into the traffic.

A man was driving, and for a moment Sam saw his face clearly. It was John Schiller, and the car he drove was an old gray Buick sedan.

Moreno was back from the airport.

"What do you know?" he was saying. "No bottles this trip! This trip my wife brought back a bongo drum. A four-foot-high bongo drum. When my teenage boy comes home and sees that—wow! I don't think I dare go home."

"Moreno—"

Captain Norton's voice broke up Moreno's tale. He had a message. Sam Ward was waiting at the Employment Office in Santa Monica. He had some interesting information; but he needed a warrant and clearance with the Santa Monica police to make an arrest.

Moreno listened to the story and forgot his bongo troubles. It was a different kind of trouble that sent him speeding out Wilshire.

Sam was waiting with an address he'd obtained from the office inside.

"What do you use, a crystal ball or a seventh sense?" Moreno demanded. "The old man's grandson! Did he tip you some way? Is there something I missed?"

"Later," Sam answered, "I'll write my memoirs. Right now—" He shoved the address under Moreno's nose and got in the car.

It wasn't far and it wasn't fashionable. It was one of the older two-story apartment buildings on a street of multiple units that faced one another like evenly matched sparring partners divided by two lanes of spasmodic traffic. Inside, an entry hall and a row of mailboxes.

Sam's finger ran along the names carefully and finally stopped.

"Mr. and Mrs. John Schuyler," he read. "What do you think?"

"I think you've hit it," Moreno said,

"Apartment 7B," Sam said.

They went up together. Daylight was fading, and the upper hall, still unlighted, was deeply shadowed.

They groped their way to the far end of it before finding the right door. Sam listened. Behind the door, the faint sound of jazz came to meet him—a bass viol, a probing trumpet, and the dominating throb of drums. John Schiller was a drummer. Sam listened a moment longer and Moreno pulled his gun.

"I don't trust a hit-and-run," he said. "It takes an unbalanced mind to do a thing like that. This character may be a psycho."

"This character," Sam said quietly, "is a fool." Then he rapped loudly on the door. "Schiller! John Schiller—open the door!"

The jazz stopped instantly.

"Schiller—"

There was another sound, a scrambling sound—as if furniture had got in someone's way.

"Okay, Moreno," Sam said.

Moreno was an expert on locks. A professional housebreaker couldn't have done the job more quickly, although he would have done it more quietly. One well-placed shot at close range, and it was only a matter of picking away the splinters.

When Sam kicked open the door, Moreno had the room covered. They were none too soon. A tall, dark-haired youth with a frightened face had scrambled as far as the kitchen door before Moreno's command, backed up by the gun, swung him about and pinned him against the wall.

John Schiller looked more like sixteen than twenty. He stared at the gun in Moreno's hand.

"Don't shoot," he said. "I haven't done anything!"

"Where's the woman?" Moreno demanded.

"I—I don't know what you mean."

"You know what we mean," Sam said. "Where is she, Schiller?"

"My name is Schuyler. John Schuyler. There's been some mistake—"

"Where is she?"

He stopped fighting. "She's gone out," he said.

"Where?"

"To the store—for groceries."

"When?"

"Not long ago. Ten, fifteen minutes."

"Did she take the car?"

"Yes, sure."

"Better get downstairs, Moreno" Sam said. "She may spot the police car when she comes back. And don't worry about Johnny. He isn't going anywhere."

Sam opened his coat to reach for a handkerchief in his back pocket. He wore his service revolver in a

shoulder holster. It looked ominous enough to keep John Schiller pinned to the wall even after Moreno had gone.

"Sit down," Sam ordered.

Obediently, Schiller moved to the nearest chair and perched nervously on the edge of the seat.

"Are you happy, Johnny?" Sam asked.

The question wasn't expected. Schiller stared at him.

"What?" he said.

"You've had nearly six months of her. Are you still happy?"

"I don't dig you," the boy began.

"You dig me, all right. You're not married, are you?"

"Not yet. Her divorce isn't final."

"Then clear out."

Schiller half rose from the chair. "Now wait a minute—"

"No, you wait and you listen," Sam said. "Don't try to be noble about this because you're not. You're a silly kid who fell for the flattering attentions of an older woman. But it's not love, Johnny. Not yours and not hers—"

"I do love Sandy!" Schiller protested.

"You loathe her," Sam said. "If it hasn't hit you yet, it will. One of these mornings you'll wake up and go into the bathroom and throw up what's left of your big love affair, and then you'll clear out, Johnny. That's exactly what you'll do, unless you're fool enough to wait around for that divorce."

He was hitting home, hard—

he knew that Schiller didn't want to hear the truth

"But she's down on her luck just now. I can't walk out when she's down on her luck!"

"Why not? Have you got a broken leg? Stop trying to be a hero, Johnny. You're out of uniform now. Sandy Downes is a grown woman. Her luck is what she made it with her big blue eyes wide open. Yours aren't quite open yet—or are they beginning to see the light? The rest of your life, Johnny. That's all you have at stake—the rest of your life."

The lecture ended when Moreno walked in with Sandy Downes. He'd intercepted her in the driveway, and she wasn't happy.

"What is all this?" she demanded. "What is all this about an accident? Johnny, does it make any sense to you?"

Moreno wasn't happy either.

"Sam," he said, "the gray Buick is down in the driveway, but there's not the slightest indication of it ever hitting Kathy Lambert."

"I know," Sam said. "It didn't."

And while Moreno looked incredulous, Sam explained it to him.

"We're taking Schiller and the woman in on Max Schiller's old complaint—missing persons. Kathy Lambert was struck down by someone driving an Impala convertible—light blue."

Kathy Lambert regained consciousness a little after six p.m. She

was young and healthy; she could absorb a lot of punishment and still survive.

An hour later a man who couldn't get along with his conscience saved the police a lot of work by turning himself in. He had been upset about his failing marriage and careless in his driving. The proof of his confession was written on the right front fender of his light blue Impala convertible.

"No crystal ball and no seventh sense," Sam explained to Moreno and Captain Norton. "Just common sense. Who knows more about the different makes and models of cars than any expert in the world?"

"My ten-year-old son," Moreno admitted.

"Exactly. A kid can recognize the make and model of any automobile a block away, and an accident like that doesn't mean to a child what it meant to Mrs. Grossman, for instance. She's a mother. She probably never saw the car. Her only thought was for the child. Max Schiller, on the other hand, is an old man with an obsession. He'd been sitting on his front porch for the past six months with only one thing on his mind—the return of his grandson. How would his grandson return?"

"In a gray Buick sedan?" Captain Norton suggested.

"That was my hunch. The old man must have seen John Schiller and Sandy Downes together in that car. We know he'd seen them

together somewhere because of the mention of her in the missing persons report. But there was no more reason to think that he could recognize the make and model of the collision car in the midst of that emotional crisis than Mrs. Grossman could—less reason, perhaps. I doubt if Max Schiller ever owned a car. And yet he gave a positive identification not only of the car but of the driver. I couldn't buy that, Captain. I couldn't believe that old Max Schiller had seen what he claimed to have seen—at least, not with his eyes."

"Not with his eyes?" Norton echoed.

"With his mind," Sam explained. "In his mind, Captain, his grandson was a killer of children when he ran off with that woman—his own children."

"Not only a crystal ball," Moreno remarked, "an analyst as well."

Sam shook his head. "No crystal ball and no analyst—just files. I ran across the Schiller case in the unsolved files just before the Captain ordered me out of the office. Something about it stuck in my mind. When we came across that accident, and one of the witnesses had the same name, I just had to follow my hunch." And then Sam Ward, who never stopped working and never relaxed, gave them one of his rare, sad smiles. "After all, as the Captain said, it was my day off."

It was late when Sam left for

home, but he didn't stop to eat on the way. Dixie would have supper warm and ready no matter how late he came in, and she would be eagerly waiting to hear what important case Captain Norton had needed him for this time. He always had to have a good story for Dixie. Tonight he was lucky. Kathy Lambert had made the front pages.

Some of the story he left out—some of the details about John Schiller and the woman he'd gone off with.

"And you found the poor old man's grandson and sent him home!" Dixie exclaimed. "Sammy, aren't you proud of yourself?"

Sam Ward cringed inside every time his wife called him "Sammy." Seventeen years ago, when they had eloped to Las Vegas, it had been a term of endearment; but seventeen years ago Sam had been only nineteen and Dixie only thir-

ty-three. She wasn't exciting or glamorous any more. She was only a ridiculous woman with the over-pampered face of a rapidly aging child.

"What will they do to the man who confessed?" she demanded.

She didn't really care. It was only a game they played—a pretense that there was something of interest left between them.

"The rest of his life," Sam said sadly.

"The rest of his life? Do you mean he'll get life for an accident that wasn't even fatal?"

For a moment Sam had difficulty remembering who Dixie was talking about. He'd had only one thing on his mind from the time he found the missing person report in the unsolved file.

"No, of course not," he said. "I was thinking of another case—another case, entirely."

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AUTHORS: **FRANCES &
RICHARD LOCKRIDGE**

TITLE: ***The Accusing Smoke***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Captain H. L. Heimrich

LOCALE: Brewster, New York

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It was a curious murder case. The facts were all there, yet there was something elusive about them. Not contradictory—you just couldn't pin them down. And the smoke . . .*

IT WOULD DO NO GOOD TO GO OUT OF the house and stand at the head of the driveway and look down it. That wouldn't make him come any sooner. It would be foolish to do that, as it was foolish to be so worried.

One does not drive more than sixty miles into New York to take one's wares to market, drive back again, and do it all on schedule. Only—he had been quite certain he would be back long before dark, and it was beginning to grow dark.

Sally Brent went out of the house in the hills near Brewster—the house which was almost all

painter's studio, with a small bedroom off a balcony and a gas plate behind a curtain. She walked a little way down the rough driveway, which was paved from the road to the big house, but not after it half circled the big house and climbed on to the studio.

She listened and did not hear the car; she gazed anxiously into the semidarkness and did not see a car's lights. It was getting cooler, Sally Brent thought, and the wind's rising—oh, I wish he'd come home! And somebody's burning leaves, which is a danger with everything outdoors so dry.

© 1959 by Frances and Richard Lockridge; originally titled, "Allergic to Murder."

She sniffed again. Not the smoke scent of leaves burning. Of course not—it was wood smoke in the late October air. And with the wind blowing as it was, wood smoke from the big house—from Uncle Roger's house.

Only—Uncle Roger wasn't there. Or wasn't supposed to be. The house was closed, or was supposed to be. Closed since August when Uncle Roger had gone to Europe. If he had come back this Friday afternoon, surely he would have let them know.

They were supposed to keep an eye on things—that was a way of paying rent for the studio house. About the only way we have, Sally thought, without bitterness—only way until "They" find out how good an artist Jim really is.

She went on down the rough, curving drive—a slight girl of twenty-two, in country slacks and simple sweater. When she had gone far enough to glimpse the big house, there was still light enough to see that smoke was coming from the central chimney, blowing toward her.

There were no lights on in the big house. She hurried a little, for no special reason. She knocked on the living-room door and, unanswered, pushed at it and it opened. She called, "Uncle Roger?" before the smoke in the room began to choke her.

The fireplace damper again, she thought. Stuck and— She tried to

call again, and made only a coughing sound. She stepped back out of the living room and filled her lungs with fresher air, then crouched low and ran into the room.

Get the windows open, get air in! Her eyes streamed; she held her breath, ran across the room to the windows, pulled two open, leaned out through one, and breathed again. Air flowed in through the open windows and after a moment she turned back into the room, groped her way across it, and found a light switch.

He lay on the wide, polished floorboards near the fireplace from which smoke was still billowing. She called again, knew it was no use, and looked at the floor around him; then, because of what she saw, she looked at her own feet. She was wearing gray loafers. She had walked through blood in them. Now she ran in them—back to the studio, away from death . . .

Age; middle sixties. A big man, who had almost certainly been still a strong man. Probably knocked unconscious by the first blow from the heavy poker. Dead not much more than an hour, the Medical Examiner thought. Quite probably, the first blow had been enough, but there had been more—a good many more.

"All right," Captain M. L. Heimrich, New York State police, said. "You can take him along."

They took the body of Roger Handley along.

Heimrich glanced around the big room. Costly for a summer place, Heimrich thought. There was a faint, by no means unpleasant, odor of wood smoke in the room. Heimrich, circling the blood which was drying now, went to the fireplace and looked down at it. The fire had gone out, or nearly. Probably never had quite taken hold; the big logs were only a little charred.

Heimrich crouched and then looked up the chimney. He reached back and said, "Got a flashlight, Charley?" and when Sergeant Charles Forniss provided one, the Captain sent the beam up the chimney. Damper three-quarters closed. No wonder there had been smoke, no wonder the fire had not taken hold. Heimrich tried the lever and when nothing happened, he tugged hard. "Stuck," he said and started to stand up and stopped, sitting on his heels.

Fallen on either side of the fire-dogs were the ends of the lightweight wood which had been used as kindling, and had burned enough, draft or no draft. The ends of sticks, some as big around as a wrist—a small wrist. And—a hairy wrist. Not what I'd pick to use as kindling, Heimrich thought, and stood up—a solid man of a little more than average height, with a solid face.

"Let's go talk to the niece," Heimrich said. "This Mrs. Brent who found him—and called us."

Forniss, who was a little taller than Heimrich, and even more solid, raised his eyebrows. "Not unless she's an Amazon, Charley," Heimrich said. "Find anything that helps?"

"Nope," Forniss said. "No forced entry. Handle of the poker wiped clean. Tracks part way to the window—but you saw that. Walked through blood on her way. You'd think she'd have noticed."

"The room was still pretty smoky when the boys got here," Heimrich said. "Even with a cross draft. You don't see much in smoke. Anything else?"

Forniss shrugged. He said there was nothing that meant much so far as he could see. However—In the waste-basket, a torn up envelope, addressed to Roger Handley, RFD 1, Brewster, New York. Woman's handwriting; postmark, White Plains, N.Y., August 11. No return address. On a table, a copy of the New York *Herald-Tribune*, dated August 12. Came through the mail. Forniss raised his eyebrows again.

"Let's go up to this studio," Heimrich said. "See if the lady's an Amazon."

She was not that; she was anything but that—a slender girl, not tall; a girl with the fragility of the small-boned. The light-boned can be stronger than they look, but not that much stronger—not strong enough to crush a man's skull with the first blow of a poker.

Sally Brent was also beautiful. Heimrich could not recall more than one or two times before when he had seen a woman to whom that absolute could be applied. Her eyes now, as she stood in the shelter of her husband's arm, were wide with shock. Or, conceivably, with fear. There was no easy way of telling which.

The man who seemed to protect her would have made two of her by weight—a big man, with the slightly sloping shoulders of an athlete. After the first moments of making common cause—but why that?—in the doorway, James and Sally Brent drew back from the doorway and Brent said, "We've been waiting for you."

The room was long; the far wall was sloping glass. There was an easel at that end, with a covered canvas on it. Along both side walls other canvases were stacked. The third of the room nearest the door was furnished and lighted as a living room. There was nothing here that had cost much—not like the big house. There were many pictures on the walls—oils, sketches. James Brent had often sought to catch his wife's beauty and hold it quiet on canvas.

"A bad thing to walk in on," Heimrich said. "You feel up to talking about it, Mrs. Brent?"

For a second she only looked at him from wide, dark eyes. Then she nodded her head slowly, each slow motion distinct, and said in a

soft voice, "Of course." She told him of the scent of wood smoke in the evening air, of going to the big house, of the smoke there, of what she saw when the light was on. She looked down at her feet then, and there was a tremor in her slender-body. But she had changed her shoes; there was no blood on these.

"You didn't think your uncle would be there?" Heimrich said.

James Brent answered that. They had known he was about due back from Europe, but not that he was back. Certainly they had not expected him up. He seldom came to the country this late in the fall.

"Anyway," Brent said, "he usually called us first. To get fires started, do the chores—we do that sort of thing for this. It must have been a spur-of-the-moment idea for him."

Brent sat beside his wife on a sofa and Heimrich sat facing them. Forniss was a statue by the door. Brent gestured to indicate "this"—that "this" was the studio. He wore a short-sleeved polo shirt. There was an angry red rash on both his wrists. Brent stopped in the gesture and looked at his wrists, because Heimrich was looking at them.

"Poison ivy," James Brent said, and gazed at Heimrich as if the detective had asked a question the purpose of which was obscure. "Been cleaning up around the place. Mostly for exercise. Ivy was choking some of the young trees. Thought I was covered up but—"

"There was a good deal of ivy in the brushwood that Mr. Handley used to start the fire," Heimrich remarked.

Brent looked puzzled. Sally Brent looked as if she were not listening, as if she were looking at something far away.

"I made a brush pile," Brent said. "Too dry outside to burn it now. I suppose he took some off the pile. He's—he was—immune to the stuff. Like Sally is. Like I'm not." He looked again at his wrists. The blisters had started.

"Captain," Sally said in the soft voice, and now she looked directly at Heimrich, not at something infinitely far away. "Wasn't it—just somebody who broke in? A tramp? A burglar? And Uncle Roger came in and—" She paused. "He usually carried quite a lot of money," she said.

"Perhaps," Heimrich said. "But there was more than two hundred dollars in his wallet, Mrs. Brent. Untouched. And breaking into a house can be a noisy business. You didn't hear anything?"

She had not; not anything. Not, specifically, the sound of a car going to or leaving the big house. But she would not have—there was a hill between. In the studio she wouldn't have heard any ordinary or small noises.

"How did you happen to go out?" Heimrich said. "So that you smelled the smoke?"

The question was innocent

enough, or nearly so. But it brought fear—surely fear this time—into the wide, dark eyes.

"Just—" she said. "No reason—to see if—I heard the wind coming up and —"

Brent reached out. He took both her slender hands into one of his. He said, "Wait. Wait, Sally." Her eyes turned away.

"I was late," Brent said. "I'd driven into town to take some stuff to my agent. Expected to get back a good deal earlier than I did. She'd gone out to see if I was coming. Got—well, anxious, I guess. And now she's afraid you'll—get ideas." He looked at Heimrich, and his look challenged the detective.

"May as well get it straight," Brent went on. "On the record. Handley had a lot of money. In the ordinary course Sally will get it. And—we can use it." He gestured again around the sparsely furnished room. "And—I wasn't late in getting home because I stopped on the way. At the big house. For—any purpose."

Questions answered before questions asked. Which didn't really mean anything.

"Why were you late?" Heimrich said.

"Car conked out. This side of Golden's Bridge. Just stopped. Walked a mile or so to a house, but nobody was there. Walked back and decided to give it another try. And—it started."

Now they both looked at Heim-

rich—and their eyes waited.

"Dirt in the carburetor probably," Heimrich said. "Happens that way sometimes."

(And when it does there is no need to call a repair man, who would remember being called . . . or, of course, deny being called.)

The wariness, the fear, did not go out of the girl's wide eyes. Was she, Heimrich wondered, afraid only of what the police might think? Or—of what she thought herself?

James Brent still held his wife's slender hands. It was impossible to see whether they still trembled.

"Your uncle," Heimrich said. "He was—what, Mrs. Brent? Your father's brother?" She nodded. "There are other relatives?"

She shook her head. "Not since Aunt Mary died," she said. "His sister. Not since that—that other awful thing."

She turned then and stared at her husband—stared up at him. Seated, Brent still was tall.

"Mary Parkins," Brent said. "Mrs. Clement Parkins?"

The inflection meant, or seemed to mean, that the name should be familiar to Heimrich. It wasn't. Heimrich shook his head to show it wasn't.

"Early last month," Brent explained. "She fell from the balcony of their apartment in White Plains. Nobody knows how. There was a rail. You'd have thought—" He shrugged. "Got dizzy," he said.

"That was the only guess anybody made. Only half an hour earlier she was fine. I was driving through White Plains that day and stopped to say hello and she gave me a drink and—" Again he shrugged. "It's all in the records," he said. "Nothing to do with this."

He had freed Sally's hands as he spoke. Now, abruptly, she lifted her hands and hid her face in them.

"Nothing to do with this," James Brent said again, and his voice was louder. "Not a damn thing."

Which, Heimrich thought, was a foolish thing for him to say since there had been two who might have inherited Roger Handley's money—and now there was only one. And now Roger Handley was also dead. And as Brent said, there would be records to show Brent had been with Mary Parkins just before she died.

"Now, Mr. Brent," Heimrich began, but a car door slammed outside and he stopped. There was a hurried knocking at the door and Forniss opened it. The man who came in, who brushed past Forniss, was broad—a heavy man. He stopped and looked around, his wide face set. He shook his head, as if bewildered.

"Hello, Uncle Clem," Sally Brent said. "Uncle Roger's been—he's been killed."

"They told me that," the heavy man said. He spoke in a heavy voice. "Stopped down at the house and they told me that. It's—it's

hard to believe. That anybody—" He stopped, turned to Heimrich, and Heimrich identified himself.

"Parkins," the heavy man said. "Clement Parkins. Rog called me this afternoon and said to come up. I get here and—" He spread his hands. "Who did it? Who'd do a thing like that to Rog?"

"I don't know yet," Heimrich said. "You say he called you?" Asked you to come up? Why, Mr. Parkins?"

"Something about—" Parkins stopped abruptly and looked at Sally Brent on the sofa. She looked back at him steadily. (Too steadily?) "I'd rather—" He seemed to consider.

"All right," he said. "I'm—I was—his lawyer. As well as his brother-in-law. You know about that? About my wife and—"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "He wanted you to come up as his lawyer? Why?"

Again Parkins seemed to consider.

"Well," he hesitated, "about his will. He—he planned to change it. With Mary—" He swallowed as if the name choked him. "With Mary dead," he said. "She and Sally inherited or—" Once more he stopped; once more he looked at Sally Brent, fragile and still on the sofa. "Or the survivor," Parkins finished.

It did not need clearer saying, and Parkins's face said as much to Heimrich. "Do I have to spell it

out? With her here?" With one heir dead, the other inherited. If that was the way Handley wanted it, he would not have needed to change his will.

"I admit I don't know what he planned," Parkins said, making that scrupulously clear . . .

"It's pretty open and shut," Forniss said, as they drove away half an hour later—drove from the studio, past the big house; drove away from a fragile and beautiful girl with fear living in her eyes, and a painter with the muscles of an athlete, his wrists inflamed by the poison of *Rhus diversiloba*, a vine which climbs over walls and up trees on hairy stems.

Heimrich did not answer at once. Forniss took his eyes from the road long enough to look at Heimrich.

"In twenty-four hours it ought to be," Heimrich said. "Maybe a little longer."

There were odds and ends to check. Handley had filed a change of address at the Brewster post office, directing that all his mail be sent to his New York apartment. Yes, there had—and how had Heimrich guessed?—been a substitute carrier on Route One on August 12. He might have slipped up.

The White Plains police hadn't liked the manner of Mary Parkins's death—hadn't liked it at all. The guard rail was high enough. But they had not been able to prove

that James Brent had not left the Parkins apartment half an hour before Mary Parkins fell, as he claimed he had—or that Clement Parkins had been there at all, as he claimed he hadn't.

Yes, the handwriting on the envelope addressed to Roger Handley in Brewster was almost certainly that of Mary Parkins. Yes, her life had been rather heavily insured, with double indemnity in case of accidental death . . .

At eight o'clock Saturday evening the trooper who had stopped by the studio, on a pretext, called Heimrich at the Hawthorne barracks to say that it was still just on the wrists. So Heimrich drove the few miles to White Plains and found that Clement Parkins was not in his apartment, but in White Plains Hospital, which did not surprise Heimrich at all.

"No," the resident doctor at the hospital said, "you can't, Captain. He's under pretty deep sedation. He's really got it bad. All over. He'll live but—man, he must have waded in it."

"Or," Heimrich said, "got a lot of it in smoke. In a room full of smoke, say."

The doctor agreed: a lot of it in smoke would explain it.

Spade work remained, of course, before they could charge Clement Parkins with the willful murder of Roger Handley. Some of it might take time, and not be easy. How,

for example, prove that Mary Parkins, with cause to fear her husband—an earlier attempt that had failed?—had written her fears to her brother? The letter was certainly ashes now—the tardy letter, read long after it could do her any good because a substitute mail carrier had, understandably enough, slipped up. That it had been read was obvious enough and that Handley had summoned his brother-in-law to explain and that Parkins—with no explanation available and with the knowledge that a murder investigation is never closed—had killed again instead.

A good deal to be dug into, to be proved. But not that Parkins had been in the room when the smoke filled it—and therefore when Handley died in it. That had proved itself—very uncomfortably for Clement Parkins who would, however, face more extreme discomforts.

Hadn't the man known, Heimrich wondered, driving north, that his brother-in-law had started a smoky fire with poison ivy brush as kindling? Or hadn't he known that the irritant poison of *Rhus diversiloba* rides in the smoke of its burning, and is virulent there?

Heimrich drove on toward Brewster with a cheerful duty to discharge. As a policeman he must, perforce, often frighten. It is pleasant when he can, with a few words, erase fright from a beautiful girl's dark eyes.

a new story by

AUTHOR: **NEDRA TYRE**

TITLE: ***A Friendly Murder***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: Kingborough, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mary Williams married late in life, but her marriage was happy in every respect—in fact, it was idyllic. Did it matter that her husband used to be Chief of Homicide?*

THE LATE SPRING MORNING HELD perfection. Mary Williams would not have believed that death was as close as the roses in the garden or as near as the robins in the cherry tree just outside the kitchen window. Violence was remote; only love pervaded the large, rambling house, as the morning reached noon, and the food in the oven and on the stove neared being done.

Suddenly all of it was ready, and she engaged in a skirmish of activity as she turned off flames and removed the food from pots and pans onto plates which she carried into the dining room and set down on the table. Then she went back to the kitchen to take off her gingham

apron and put on her organdy one. "Mary."

Her husband called down to her from the attic stairway. The attic fascinated him. He liked working there better than in his study, and probing into its odds and ends never failed to intrigue him.

"Yes, darling," she called up.

The affection in her voice matched the affection in his.

His footsteps began to descend and there were lightness and joy in them—a young goat caprioling along peaks couldn't have been more surefooted; it was still incomprehensible that her agile, alert husband had been retired for five years as Chief of Homicide.

His quick steps continued and she heard him enter the dining room. Then there was silence, and she knew that his eyes had lit up at the sight of the asparagus. Bless Mr. Martin, who had saved it especially for her—he was such a dear person and such a marvelous grocer.

Her husband's eager glance would have gone from the asparagus to the ham, then to the boiled corn, and then to the cucumber salad; his nose would have picked up the scent of the biscuits she was about to take from the oven; the excitement over the food had deflected his thought from whatever he had been about to say when he had called down from the third floor.

What a delight her husband was!—a charming companion, an ardent lover, and what pleasure it was to cook for him!

Marriage had come late to Mary Williams. She had lived a contented life without it. She had liked men—she had also loved them, and had been engaged twice. But when she and Donald had thought of marrying, he had been transferred and her mother had got sick and couldn't bear to have anyone nurse her but Mary. Donald had been ready to marry, and really you couldn't expect a man to wait indefinitely, especially when he was way off in a strange town; so he had married a girl he met there.

Then she had fallen in love with

John, but just when they were about to marry, her Cousin Margaret had left her a legacy and Mary wanted to travel. John couldn't get away from his job for more than two weeks at a time, and anyway he said the good old U.S.A. was all he ever wanted to see; he was sure Mary didn't mean all that about going to Bangkok and Beirut, where cholera or typhus or God-only-knew-what diseases were rampant. But she certainly had meant it, and she had gone and had had the time of her life. So John married Peggy Wilson and they had two sets of twins and one of triplets and were busy and happy.

What with one thing and another, Mary hadn't married, and had finally thought she never would. Existence was fun anyway, and even after her parents died and her brothers and sisters had moved away, life was still full. She loved the old family home, no matter what everyone said about it being too big for her to live in alone—imagine one person barely five feet tall having a three-storied, fifteen-room house all to herself!

She had really put aside all thoughts of marriage and was content to be just one statistic in that three million (or whatever the figure was, surplus of unmarried women. Who on earth would have thought romance would sneak up on her at a Great Books Discussion Group? But it had. And at the Public Library, of all places.

There were a number of nice men in the group, but Tom Williams was the nicest. His mind was the best one among them, and how impressive he was discussing De Quincey's *Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow*, Mill's *On Liberty*, and Milton's *Aeropagitica*.

Then one night he happened to ask if he might take her home and she said yes; and after that she kept saying yes to his suggestions, and in three months she was married to—of all things—a retired policeman. Of course Tom Williams had been Chief of Homicide, but that still made him a policeman. He had retired before they were married, but he kept busy; he worked with volunteer groups trying to do something about juvenile delinquency; he lectured twice a week at the University on something or other about modern crime detection; but his chief pleasure came from delving into long unsolved crimes in the city and state. He was positive that many of them could still be solved.

She loved him because he was handsome and kind and intelligent; sometimes she thought she loved him most for his appetite.

"Marvelous," he said, as he took another slice of ham and gave himself to its consumption. "Mary, the years with you have been the happiest of my life. And that's no discredit to Alice. She was a fine woman and a perfect wife for twenty years."

"It's not just the cooking," he added, as he reached for his fourth biscuit. He was quite serious and solemn when he said that.

There was a glint in his wife's eyes when she answered, "Yes, darling, I know quite well it's not just the cooking. But what were you about to ask me when you called down from the attic?"

"This wonderful meal made me forget. I was going to ask you if you'd ever known Augustin Jason."

"Augustin Jason? Should I? No, dear, I don't think so."

She got up to remove the plates, and when she had put the dishes in the sink she took the ice cream from the freezer compartment and filled two sherbet glasses; then she poured crème de cacao over the ice cream and carried the dessert back to the dining room.

Her husband's eyes held the delight of a child who has been given an unexpected present. "This is a perfect end to a perfect lunch," he said.

Mary Williams thought: to satisfy appetites is a woman's happiest occupation.

"Now, darling, go take your nap," she urged him when he had finished his dessert.

They engaged in their usual affectionate argument about washing dishes. He had never washed a dish since he had entered the house but he always offered, pretended he thought it was his duty, pretended

it was only her stronger views that kept him from it.

"Very well, dear," he capitulated. "But only if you'll let me do the dinner dishes tonight."

Her love for her husband was her reason for living, she decided as she filled the dishpan with water, added the detergent, and swirled up the suds. When she had finished the dishes, she reminded herself, she must polish all the silver.

Augustin Jason.

Somehow the name sounded familiar. Perhaps she did know it after all.

Augustin Jason.

"Why, that's the name of the man I murdered!" she suddenly remembered.

If you could call it murder. Though her husband, who had devoted his life to law enforcement, would certainly call it murder.

Bother!

What in the world was her husband up to?

She knew he was spending a lot of his time on unsolved crimes, and the Jason case had been an unsolved murder. Her husband, the now revered and extravagantly praised retired Chief of the Homicide Bureau, was so brilliant and so thorough he would be sure to solve it. She had been lucky that it had been committed long before he had moved to Kingborough.

Murder had just happened to Mary Williams—she had stumbled

on it, like an accident, and it had been the easiest thing in the world for her to do. And even if she had confessed at the time, no one would have believed her. You might almost say she had done it as a friendly act—yes, as a kind of favor for a friend.

And after a while she had put it completely out of her mind. She had really and truly forgotten about it. Wasn't it proof that she felt no guilt when she didn't even recognize the name of Augustin Jason when her husband had asked her about it?

And that girl. Why, Mary Williams couldn't even remember the girl's name! It was something simple that was spelled in an unusual way. Oh, now, she recalled it—it was Betty, but spelled Bety. A poor, sad, distraught little thing. They had worked in the same office, in the same row of typists.

Bety was from a small town in the eastern part of the state. She didn't seem to have gumption enough to say boo to a goose; nevertheless, she had got herself involved in a miserable affair with a married man, and one afternoon, in the midst of copying a contract, she had doubled up in hysteria.

The section manager had sent Mary home with Bety, and when the hysteria had subsided, real despair had assaulted the poor girl. She had to get up, she insisted—she had to meet the man at the theater. Mary had persuaded her to

lie down and had telephoned a doctor, who made an emergency visit and gave Bety a sedative. Afterward the girl had fallen into a deep sleep and the landlady promised to look in on her during the night.

When Mary had got up to leave, she noticed the theater ticket which had dropped out of Bety's purse. Mary had picked it up—she was determined to meet the man, whoever he was, and give him a piece of her mind, and tell him to leave Bety alone.

True, Mary had been terrified. But indignation saw her through it. She had wanted to ask one of her brothers, preferably Charlie, or even Jim or Sam, to go with her; but she realized she couldn't share the girl's secret, and anyway there was only one theater ticket.

Things kept delaying her. Supper had been late for some reason or other. Then it had been her father's night for poker and there were no refreshments for his guests, and Mary had to do some last-minute shopping.

The delays only added to her cowardice and reluctance; besides, the night was cold and dark, and she wasn't used to going places alone—a number of young women had been molested in Kingborough in recent weeks. All of a sudden she remembered Cousin Luther's collection of pistols; but he was away on a business trip and she couldn't ask his permission. She

hadn't thought he would mind, and his room was never locked. No one saw her take the smallest revolver from the case on the mantelpiece and put it in her pocket.

With all her delays, the third act was well under way when she entered the theater.

It was a dreadfully raucous musical, and the man she sat down beside made an improper advance. "I'm not Bety," she said furiously.

"Well, it was nice of Bety to send such a charming substitute," he had answered, and had made another improper advance. Nothing had ever embarrassed her so much. Even though they were in darkness and in the last row she was horrified that someone she knew might have seen them. Then he lurched toward her again, this time more determinedly. The music blared and kept blaring. It was a perfect camouflage, so she had shot him and no one had noticed.

Then Mary had got up and left—simply walked out. She had murdered a man whose name she didn't know, though she learned it the next day when it flared on the front page of both the morning and evening papers.

And that was all there had been to it.

Apparently Bety hadn't even missed the theater ticket—she must have been too upset. No one had ever questioned Bety about Augustin Jason's violent death—no one had known of her relationship

with the man. Months later a discreet note had come from Bety, long since moved back to her home town, thanking Mary for her kindness in getting her back to her boarding house late that afternoon when she had been so upset by overwork, and saying she was about to be married and that everything had turned out for the best.

Of course, Mary should have confessed to the murder. After all, it wasn't right to kill somebody and just wash your hands of the consequences. But there were so many reasons why she hadn't confessed.

In the first place, her mother had always said that no lady ever got her name on the front page, and murder would have put Mary's name not only on the front page but in the headlines. Then, at that time her Uncle Henry had been involved in a political campaign as a candidate for mayor on the Reform Ticket. The opposition had tried to do everything to blacken his name, and what wouldn't they have made over a niece who was a murderer? So in deference to Uncle Henry's political ambitions she hadn't owned up to murder.

Then Mr. Joe Reed, who was the chief editorial writer for the *Kingborough Star*, and came every Thursday to play poker with her father, wrote a long piece which convinced everybody that hired assassins from outside had murdered the unsavory Augustin Jason. And

Mary did not want to make a liar out of Mr. Joe . . .

Surely she needn't worry at this late date. Yet in spite of the late spring warmth and the kitchen made hot by the cooking, she felt icy fingers of fear.

She must work, and she must think. It would be a good thing to polish the silver, as she had planned. She began playing a game with herself in deadly earnest: if she could finish polishing all the salad forks before her husband's nap was over, everything would be all right. It would be a sign that he wouldn't discover the murderer of Augustin Jason.

Though the forks in their long supine row in the chest somehow looked like small corpses lined up in a communal grave, she grew more and more confident as their number increased. She had polished eleven of them; she was picking up the twelfth, the last one, and was almost home free when she was caught out. She glanced up from her work to see her husband at the kitchen door.

"I had a nice nap," he said.

"Good," she said, dropping the twelfth fork to the floor.

He picked it up and handed it to her. Then he loitered. It wasn't like him to linger that way. He was a man of action and quick decision.

"Mary?"

"Yes, darling."

"Did anyone else ever live in this house?"

"No, darling, just the family. Grandpa built the place and left it to Papa."

That was the truth, but from the silence it bred in her husband she knew that it was somehow a threatening answer. The gaping silence had to be filled.

"What I mean, darling, is that we've always lived here. But other people have stayed with us. During the depression Mama all but held open house day and night. She couldn't bear it if anybody we knew didn't have somewhere to live or something to eat. And of course relatives have come and gone all the time. Aunt Madge visited us once and stayed for six years. And Cousin Luther—"

But her throat closed up at the mention of Cousin Luther and the thought of his gun collection.

"I see, darling. A lot of other people have lived here—that's what I wanted to know."

He went back up to the attic and after a while he came down and had a shower and it was time for him to leave for his lecture at the University. He told her he might be late because he wanted to go by the Public Library to read some old newspapers.

"Are you going to read about the Augustin Jason murder?" she asked.

"Yes, darling, I am."

He kissed her goodbye and she stood in the hall and then tiptoed to the door to watch him drive out

of sight. She kept standing there as if his goodbye had been a ruse and he would come back to spy on her. Then she raced up the stairs to the attic.

It was like a giant catchall, a gargantuan hodgepodge. It was jammed with discarded furniture, castoff books, old lamps with battered bases and broken shades, the first radio with a loudspeaker her father had bought, a chest that had belonged to her great grandfather who had been a sea captain, a huge wicker table that had stood in the middle of what they had used to call the sun parlor. The attic also had huge closets in which old clothes hung—enough to fill a costumer's shop.

The sight of these familiar, outmoded things had often brought a sense of pleasure to her; now there was a dangerous threat among them.

What inanimate thing was her deadly enemy?

Where was the proof that she had once committed murder?

What object among all this worn junk had made her husband call out?

Where was the silent stool pigeon?

Her eyes catalogued the jumble around her and then she saw what her husband had come across.

It was the coat she had worn on the night she had murdered Augustin Jason. The evening had been cold and damp and she had worn

an old coat which she hated and had discarded after that fateful night.

But surely the coat could not incriminate her now! It could not be her accuser or a witness for the prosecution.

But then she remembered. In the right-hand pocket was the stub of the theater ticket with the seat number and the date of performance!

It all came back in a flood of memory—how all the stories dealing with the crime had said: if only someone knew the person who had held that ticket number that night, the crime would be solved.

She sat down on a dilapidated chair whose springs twanged as she touched them. The coat fell like a laprobe across her knees. She clasped the coat to her as if she needed its warmth, then flung it to the floor.

If she could only die.

If she had never met her husband.

If her marriage had never been.

Her husband was a good man and a just one, and an intelligent policeman. If he had not divined her guilt from her demeanor, as an officer of the law he would know how to go about proving it. His integrity would force him to complete his investigation. And this one ironic solution of an old forgotten crime would make a travesty of his entire life—and hers.

Already she could see the head-

lines: Former Chief of Homicide Married to Murderess; or Detective's Hobby of Solving Unsolved Crimes Leads to Own Wife's Guilt.

Not even for his love of her would he conceal that she had committed murder—she knew that, she was certain of it. A life-long sense of principle would force him to reveal her offense, and after that the meaning of his existence would be over. There would be nothing for him to live for—he wouldn't lecture, he wouldn't pursue his unsolved crimes, their marriage would be wrecked . . .

If only her own death could solve the problem. But it wouldn't. He would still have to proclaim her guilt, still have to ruin himself.

She sat there thinking, and her mind ticked off its own aphorisms:

What has been done once in indignation can be done once in love.

When there's nothing else to do, there's nothing else to do.

No, that wouldn't be necessary. A miracle would happen. Their marriage would not be threatened. Things would go on in the same satisfying way. Meantime she would act as she had always acted: she would make the house as spotless and lovely as she could, would prepare her husband's favorite food, make herself as pretty as possible.

It was time to get busy again—everything must have a festive air.

She waxed the floors. She cut

blossoms from the crabapple tree and placed them around the house. She got out the best goblets and the Royal Doulton china; then she went to the kitchen to begin dinner—it would be what her husband liked most: rare steak, new peas in cream, baked squash, spring onions, deep-dish apple pie.

When the meal was under way she had a quick bath and put on the yellow dress that was her husband's favorite, and wore the earrings he had given her for a Valentine present.

Soon he came in, looking tired and despondent. He brightened when he saw her in the yellow dress, and kissed her warmly. They seldom drank but she had set out the bottles; she told him to mix drinks, and they toasted each other and held hands as they drank.

The food pleased him even more than usual. And Mary sat waiting for the miracle.

But there was to be no miracle. She knew that he was not yet quite sure that she was a murderer—but she also knew it would not be long.

When he had finished a second serving of apple pie, she realized that all diversions were at an end.

He took the coffee cup she handed to him and said, "Mary, this morning, didn't you say that you didn't remember the Augustin Jason case?"

How could she look at him now and lie?

"No, dear, it wasn't quite like

that. When you asked me about the name I really didn't remember it. But now I do. It was a murder—here in Kingborough long ago. He wasn't a nice man—according to what was in the newspapers."

"But he was murdered. He was a human being—and no one had the right to end his life."

Her intuition had been right: nothing could or would divert her husband. There was no arguing about it: justice, not mercy, was the quality that claimed his deepest allegiance.

"Excuse me, darling," she said. "I'm just going upstairs for a moment. I won't be long."

The heat closed in on her as she entered the attic. She opened the windows, then stepped out onto the small balcony outside the window that faced the garden. The cool breeze soothed her; the cold, ancient stars encouraged her.

"Darling."

He answered her at once. "Yes, dear?"

"Darling, will you come up here a moment, please. I'm in the attic."

His steps were quick. He reached the attic in seconds.

"Come out on the balcony, darling. I want to show you something. Look, sweet, there's a new moon. Isn't it beautiful?"

He was beside her, smiling at her, then smiling up at the new moon.

It took her only an affectionately resolute push.

AUTHOR: **THOMAS WALSH**

TITLE: ***Ed Mahoney's Boy***

TYPE: Cop Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mahoney the cop, shot down only a minute after four hoodlums had stuck up Riley's Tavern—and now in the hospital with no more than a fighting chance at best . . .*

THEY LET EDDIE MAHONEY IN for a moment before the operation. Halfway between the bureau and the door he stopped his tiptoeing and looked down at the old man, lying flat in the narrow white bed, his hands extended as stiffly at his sides as if someone had placed them there, his normally ruddy face shot through now with streaks of sickly paleness, his eyes closed, his mouth working a little at the corners. There was no sound in the room but his breathing—loud, harsh, labored.

Young Eddie felt something twist in his stomach when he heard that. He turned his hat over in his hands, he licked his lips once or twice. Then he said, "Pop," in a

voice that seemed to burst out thickly over the large lump in his throat. "How you feeling, Pop?"

Standing at the foot of the bed, one hand on the low iron rail, the nurse spoke. "He's unconscious," she said. "He can't hear you. Dr. Lincoln is waiting for him now upstairs."

Nodding at her, Eddie felt all dry and cold inside—funny. He stepped back, looking down at the old man until he reached the door; then, in the corridor, he closed the door quietly after him and put on his hat.

Kathleen O'Rourke and her father walked with him silently to the bare reception hall, where the telephone girl read a magazine be-

hind the switchboard on the left, and a young intern in a white suit stood by the glass doors with his hands behind his back, staring out at the street and humming under his breath.

The big electric clock above the switchboard read twenty to one, and when he looked at it Eddie thought it must have been just about an hour ago when it happened. Probably the girl was reading her magazine then too, and Ed Mahoney was all right—pounding the beat with the club in his hand, not expecting anything or looking for anything, thinking about the weather maybe, or the trouble he'd had with his feet. An hour ago, half-past eleven—thirty minutes before he'd be off duty for the night. Then Kathleen touched his arm, and he glanced quickly down at her. He'd forgotten she was there.

"He looked pretty bad," he told her huskily. "He—how many times did they shoot him, Tom?"

Big Tom O'Rourke cleared his throat. "Twice," he said. "They were jumping into the car when he came around the corner. Four of them. They'd just that minute stuck up Riley's Tavern."

"Riley's," Eddie repeated. "They got away?"

"Tonight they did," O'Rourke said heavily. "But Riley and his bartender saw them plain; they're at headquarters now looking over the file. It won't be an hour till we know who they were."

"Yes," Eddie said. He wondered if O'Rourke thought that was going to help the old man any. "I'll wait till I find out what happens upstairs. You take Kathleen home. I'll call you as soon as there's news."

"I'm not sleepy," O'Rourke said. Settling his big body down on the wooden bench against the wall, he knotted his fingers together between his knees. He was a plainclothes man in Ed Mahoney's precinct, tall, broad, powerfully built. His freckled face looked grim and savage; he didn't seem to see the floor he stared at. Once or twice, as if he didn't trust the clock on the wall, he took out his watch and looked at it.

Twenty years ago, Eddie thought, O'Rourke and Ed Mahoney had started out together on the force. And he'd stay now because tonight, for Ed Mahoney, might be the finish. They'd do what they could, the doctor had said; but he hadn't been too hopeful. The chest was a bad place. There was no more than a fighting chance.

Kathleen tried to smile. She said cheerfully, "We'll all stay. Nothing's going to happen to him, Eddie."

"Sure," Eddie said. He held her fingers tightly in his own, possessed by a dumb agony as he thought of all the things he could have done for the old man, and how much nicer he could have been to him. It was strange why he'd never thought of that till now,

when there was nothing he could do but sit and wait.

His thoughts became as intolerable as the quietness of the bare hall around him. Yet he said nothing to disturb that quietness; only, when the intern went away, he got up and stood in his place at the door. Each time he looked at the clock, the minute hand, incredibly, would have moved no more than a notch or two; all the time, staring dully out at the street, he could hear the faint metallic purr of its mechanism humming in his ears.

It was a quarter to two before Dr. Lincoln appeared, walking briskly, and polishing his glasses with a handkerchief. The patient, he said, had come through the operation exceptionally well. They'd found the bullets and removed them, and rest was the important thing now. Rest, and the condition of his heart.

"He'll be all right?" Big Tom O'Rourke asked.

Dr. Lincoln said he certainly hoped so. But he could have no visitors until tomorrow, and perhaps not then. He advised them all to go home now, and get some rest. If Mahoney's condition changed at all during the night, they would be notified at once.

Eddie nodded, and thanked him. He pretended to Kathleen, in the cab going home, that he wasn't worried at all now, and that everything was fine. But the shadow in Big Tom's eyes he felt reflected in

his own, so that when the cab stopped at O'Rourke's he would not get out, but kissed Kathleen, waved to her father, and said he'd see them in the morning; he'd call them first thing.

In the apartment he had shared with the old man ever since he could remember he strolled about for a while aimlessly, turning on all the lights. It seemed very quiet there, very empty and still, with the old man's stuff scattered all around—a shirt on the back of a chair, shoes set a drunken angles near that, a pair of suspenders hanging from a knob on the bureau drawer. He had four or five guns in the closet—the old man liked guns—and when Eddie thought of them he opened the door and looked in. But he didn't touch them; instead, in the kitchen, he made some coffee and drank it black out of one of the thick mugs the old man liked because they didn't break easily.

Afterward, rinsing the cup, he looked at himself in the mirror over the sink where the old man shaved every day. His father wasn't very old—forty-six, and as solid and steady as a rock still—but Eddie never thought of him as anything else but the old man. That was odd, too. There was no reason for it. Forty-six was still young, a man's prime; but ten years ago, or fifteen, when Eddie had been seven, he had thought of him the same way. The old man—the other

kids on the block called their fathers that too; he supposed that's where it started with him. To the other kids, Eddie remembered, the old man had always been Mahoney the cop.

When he'd been twenty-two he'd have looked a good deal like Eddie. In the mirror now Eddie could see the old man's square, short nose, the old man's firm jaw and straight mouth in his own features. But there was a difference somewhere, around the eyes perhaps—Eddie's were sharper, more alert, smarter.

There hadn't been anything Eddie couldn't talk him out of—not playing hooky as a kid, or going to a movie, afternoons he should have been in high school. Even his lickings had been nothing; he'd always been afraid of hurting him. Afterward, when Eddie sobbed in his room, he'd bring in cake or ice cream, and talk to him. Promise now?

Eddie had always promised. Sure, Pop—never again. When he thought of that now, he despised himself. "You cheap punk," he said to the face in the mirror that stared back at him.

In the parlor again he switched off the light and lay down on the couch by the phone, smoking, waiting for it to ring. It remained silent. And the thoughts went on and on in his head—nothing he could do stopped them. He lay there, wakeful, until milk wagons clattered in the street, and the thin-

nest, clearest blue he had ever seen crept down coldly across the top of the window.

When it was full light he called the hospital, and then O'Rourke, telling him there had been no change. After that he made more coffee, shaved, and changed his shirt. At nine, when he reached the bank, Mr. Stone called him into the office.

"I read about your father coming down in the train," he said. "Too bad, Eddie. We're all hoping he'll pull through, and if I know Ed Mahoney I think he will. Collins will take over for you today; don't worry about getting back until this is settled. Let me know how he makes out now."

Outside, walking home, Eddie thought of the time he'd met Mr. Stone, two years ago—a crisp winter morning when he'd gone down with the old man to the bank. The boy, Ed Mahoney had said, wanted to work in a bank; he thought he'd like that. And if Mr. Stone could give him a place, at anything—Mr. Stone had glanced keenly at Eddie, and then at the old man; he said nothing about references, or previous experience, or why he'd left his last job, the way employers usually did. He gave the old man a cigar, and thought they could find something for him. Ed Mahoney's boy, he was sure, would be all right.

The old man had a lot of friends. All that morning the phone kept ringing; and though each time Ed-

die's heart thickened and almost stopped inside him, it was never the hospital on the other end.

About eleven, stretched out on the couch, he dozed off; ringing woke him an hour later. He reached for the phone and had it in his hands when the ringing came again, and he realized it was the doorbell.

The man standing in the dim hallway outside looked at him for a long moment, head bent forward slightly between his shoulders. "Eddie Mahoney?" he asked, and came in without waiting for an answer, his hand outstretched, his wide mouth set in a self-conscious grin. He was a tall man, rather stout, dressed smoothly in gray; his face impressed Eddie as being vaguely familiar.

"How's Ed?" he said, when he was in the room. "D'ye think he'll get on all right? D'ye think he'll pull out of it?" Then, putting his hat on a chair, he chuckled and looked him slowly up and down. "But sure," he said, "you don't know me at all. You're wondering who I am."

In the light now, Eddie saw his face more clearly—full-fleshed, rather pale, rather heavy around the mouth.

"Ah," he said, and sighed, "you don't know me. How should you? It's the size of a rabbit you were the last time I saw you. I'd have balanced you in the palm of me hand. Twenty years—twenty years.

Eddie." He sighed again, his small eyes never leaving Eddie's face. Moving his shoulders, the sudden sadness in his face made his heavy mouth droop almost ludicrously. "Well," he added, and cleared his throat. "It's harder than I thought it would be, boy, but there's nothing gained by waiting. I'm Joe Mahoney—your Uncle Ed's brother. Your father, boy."

"My father?" Eddie said stupidly.

"God knows," Joe Mahoney went on in a trembling voice, "I've not been much of a father. But I've had a rough life, Eddie—an unfortunate life. I've done my best according to my lights. And the things that happen to a man cannot be helped. It's age that learns you that."

"Wait a minute," Eddie said huskily. "What are you talking about? You crazy? My father—"

He stopped there, staring at Joe Mahoney, suddenly without any doubt in his mind. That look around the stout man's eyes, the small, shrewd brightness he had seen in his own in the mirror last night, struck him dumb. The face was like the old man's—it was that which had been familiar about it. But the eyes were different. The eyes weren't Ed Mahoney's; they were, Eddie saw, his own.

With a thumb and forefinger rubbing the inner corners of them now, Joe Mahoney nodded bitterly.

"Never a word—never a word about me did you hear. He never told you then. Ah!" He shook his

head blindly. "It's a long story, Eddie, but maybe this is not the time for it. I'm tired and worn out, d'ye see; three hours I've been walking to get here, without even the carfare, after I read about Ed in the morning paper. Tired I am, boy. Tired!" He rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand, looking dully around the room. "It's not likely there'd be a drop of whiskey in the house?"

"Sit down," Eddie said. His mind was frozen numb; he couldn't get it to function. It was a relief to go out to the kitchen, for the decanter and a glass. When he had them he came back slowly, with a dazed feeling that this was all a dream. Joe Mahoney was fantastic; he'd have vanished now, of course. He wasn't real. An imaginary figure, nothing more. The excitement and the worry, no sleep—

In the living room Joe Mahoney had not vanished. He was sitting in a chair, his hands on his knees, his fat face pathetically droopy. Handing him the glass, pouring his drink, Eddie said huskily, "I don't understand this. Pop never told me he had a brother. He never told me I wasn't his son."

"A fine man," Joe Mahoney answered heavily, "Ed always was. But a hard one, too—an unforgiving one, boy. There was trouble, d'ye see, when you were a small lad, after your poor mother died. Trouble that might have happened to better men than me. It was that

trouble made me leave you, entrusting your care to my only brother. Who else?"

Tears shone on his fat cheeks. He blinked his eyes against them.

"Many's the night since I've had the heartscald, Eddie, not knowing where you were, or how you were. I dared not write for the trouble, d'ye see? They'd have traced the letter. But I thought of you every night, as God's my judge. Every night for twenty years!"

His mind still caught in that frozen inaction. Eddie could think of nothing to say. The stout man sobbed then, while he stared at him; he put his head in his hands, and the choked sounds he made roused in Eddie an uncomfortable embarrassment.

"Here," he said, his voice sounding strange to himself. "You'd better rest. There's a bed inside, and you'd feel better for some sleep. I'll be back in an hour from the hospital. We'll—we'll talk then."

"Better!" Joe Mahoney said bitterly. "When a man's heart is broken, boy—"

Five minutes later, when Eddie finished dressing and looked in at him, he was asleep.

At the hospital Big Tom O'Rourke was sitting on the same bench. They went in to Ed Mahoney's room together. His eyes were open now, the fingers of one hand moving a little on the blanket.

"I don't know," O'Rourke said

angrily, "but that I'm ashamed of you. Will you never learn to be properly careful, man?"

On the pillow Ed Mahoney moved his head sideways to them, then winked.

"Next week," Eddie said, "he'll be eating a big steak. The doctor says you came through fine; all you got to do now is take it easy. How're you feeling?"

"Good," Ed Mahoney whispered painfully. "Good, son."

But the paleness in his cheeks was mottled and ugly, and his hand was dry.

"You can't kill a Mahoney with two little holes," Eddie said, and grinned at him. He had been almost reluctant to come in; there was a feeling in his heart that something had changed between them. And yet, when he saw the old man, nothing had changed. The feeling had vanished completely. Joe Mahoney seemed not to exist.

"Don't talk, Pop," he said. "I'll be in tonight again. Kathleen and Mr. Stone wanted us to say hello for them."

Ed Mahoney winked again. When they turned to go his eyes followed them.

On the steps outside the hospital Big Tom blew his nose loudly. "It's a hell of a world," he growled. "But he'll be all right. It's only his looks that—" He came down the steps at Eddie's side with a heavy breath, and did not speak again until they stopped at the Automat on

the corner for a sandwich and coffee.

"Tom," Eddie said then. It was difficult to speak, an effort to mention Joe Mahoney. For a moment he did not know how to continue. When Tom grunted and looked up he said it some way, not thinking of the words at all, watching the other man's face.

"If you know," O'Rourke said slowly, after he had finished, "why, then you know."

"It's true?" Big Tom, looking helpless and sullenly angry, nodded after a moment. "Pop never told me," Eddie said quietly. "Why?"

"Because his brother is a bad man, good for nothing but trouble and worry. He never wanted you to know him, or hear of him."

His voice was low, rather savage; he spoke without looking into Eddie's face. "I'll not tell you much about him; I know Ed wouldn't want me to. But he never took care of your mother, or of you. Ed is a kind man, and a good one. I don't think he ever wanted another man dead in his life but your father. He didn't hate him. It was because of you. He—" Stopping there, he shrugged his shoulders.

Eddie nodded slowly. A lot of things became clear to him—little pictures rose up in his memory. He said, "Pop was afraid I'd be like him?"

"God forbid," Big Tom said harshly. "There's this you should

know: he killed your mother with neglect and abuse. What food there was for her and for you, Ed bought. Wherever you lived, Ed paid the rent. What clothes you had, Ed provided. And when the trouble came—"

"The trouble," Eddie nodded. "He used that word too. What was it?"

Big Tom looked at him deliberately. "It was a man that died one night with a bullet in the back of his head. An honest little man who ran a tailor shop, and who had a bit of money in the till. When they found him the money was gone, and your father was gone too. There was no proof—the girl that saw it happen was not sure it was your father. But Joe Mahoney did not wait to learn that. Or was he running from himself? Men do, lad, when something's heavy on their minds."

Whiteness touched Eddie's lips. Softly, as if he was making an effort to clarify his own thoughts, he said, "I felt that sometimes—about Pop being afraid. For me. I never understood it. I knew I wasn't like him; sometimes I wondered about it. I did things he'd never have done. I—"

Under his thick brows Big Tom O'Rourke's eyes were steady and piercing. "You're Ed Mahoney's boy," he said. "That's the thing you're to remember. That's the thing you've got to be proud of. You'll not forget that, Eddie, be-

cause there's nothing can change it. Nothing in God's world. There was no one else that Ed ever lived for but you. He gave you what he was. He made your heart and soul. And they're the things that count—they're more important than arms and legs. You're not to forget them."

"No," Eddie said. He wasn't thinking of O'Rourke's words at all; they weren't coherent to him till long afterward. There was something else in his mind—the memory of Joe Mahoney's eyes, and his own.

When he got back to the apartment late that afternoon, Joe Mahoney was sitting in the parlor, shaved, with one of the old man's clean shirts on, and the whiskey decanter empty at his side. While Eddie broiled a steak for supper he sat by the kitchen table and talked, telling him how he'd just got back from the West the week before, and had been trying ever since to find them.

Listening, Eddie said little. There was a curious deadness of emotion inside him, as if Joe Mahoney were something inanimate that he neither despised nor hated; something that was here, before him, and gave him no feeling for or against. He talked of all the places he'd been—Cuba, the Southwest, Alaska—and he talked well and vividly, with a crude humor that made the places live.

"Perhaps," he said, as they sat down to eat, "'twould be as well for you to say nothing of me to Ed yet. The shock, d'ye see, might do him harm. When he's better, when he's home—that's the time to let him know."

"Yes," Eddie said. "I guess it is."

"Fine places," Joe Mahoney said, sighing, "I've seen, boy. I was born with wandering feet. That was a thing Ed could never understand. Set him in a place and he stayed there . . . But tell me now—he's looked out for you well? He's got you a fine job?"

He nodded over great forkfuls of steak while Eddie told him about the bank. At the end, small eyes gleaming, he pointed the knife out.

"You're your father's son, for all that. It isn't the job you should have, Eddie. You'll have felt that, many a time. You'll have wanted to get out—"

Eddie said shortly, "It's okay."

Stretching enormously, Joe Mahoney leaned away from the table.

"It's rotting while you live, boy, while you're young. Ah!" He yawned and got up, watching Eddie curiously, but he said nothing more. With the evening paper in his hand he went in and sprawled on the couch, while Eddie washed and dried the dishes. At half-past seven, as Eddie was leaving, he coughed and sat up.

"I'm low," he said. "I've had the rotten luck lately. There wouldn't be a dollar or two, or maybe five,

you could let me have for my pocket?"

The five-dollar bill Eddie handed him he took and flung carelessly on the table.

"It won't be long," he said, "till you see more like that in my hands than you ever dreamed of. I've made fine money in my time; I'll make it again. And I'll not forget you for this."

It was only when Eddie was downstairs, in the street, that he remembered Joe Mahoney had not asked about the old man at all.

That night Kathleen went to the hospital with him. They sat in Ed Mahoney's room for five minutes, talking cheerfully to him; and telling him all the things that had happened. He listened with his eyes half closed, not speaking very much. When they were going he raised one hand and waved to them; it fell back on the pillow, limply, before they reached the door.

"I can see he's better," Kathleen said. "Much better. You mustn't be worrying about him any more."

"Yes," Eddie said. "I saw it too."

He wanted to believe his words; there was no reason, he thought, why he shouldn't, there was no logic to account for the intolerable oppression that weighed down his heart. But he could not lose that oppression; it stayed with him even after he left Kathleen at her home, and walked on alone. It

frightened him. He fought it savagely, and could not lose it.

When he got back to the parlor, to Joe Mahoney, he took a long drink out of the fresh bottle of whiskey on the table.

And he sat up for a while, talking, finding it a relief to talk, to be forced to think of something else besides the look on the old man's face—the blue-lipped, tired look that would not leave his mind. He had seen that look on other faces before, on faces that did not lose it, and changed it only for another, cold, tranquil, still.

But Joe Mahoney was not touched by that feeling. He laughed at it. What was the sense in worrying? He talked of all the things he'd done, all the men he'd known. And then somehow, insensibly, he wasn't talking so much; he was only putting in a question now and again, while Eddie told him what he had to do at the bank.

It wasn't much of a job, but Mr. Stone liked him, and it might lead to something better. He worked in the cage, and sometimes he made up the pay rolls, with Barnes the messenger. He could handle a gun; the old man had taught him that long ago. So occasionally, when it was Markham's pay roll, or something big like that, he went out with Barnes and Bill Langford, the guard.

Joe Mahoney said it would be nice to get out of the office, even for

a few minutes. It would give him a chance at some fresh air and sunshine. But it didn't happen more than once a week, he supposed.

Fridays, Eddie said. Tomorrow. They pulled out about half-past ten, and walked over; it was only two blocks. They'd never had any trouble. The streets were crowded and—

—He stopped suddenly, watching Joe Mahoney's face. What did he want to know all that for? And Joe Mahoney laughed, throwing his head back to the ceiling. It was a huge joke. He began to talk of Florida, and the things a man could do there with a few thousand dollars. The beaches, the pretty girls, the moonlight, the fine clothes—

"Living," Joe Mahoney said. "Not rotting, boy. Not rotting. Life is sad and short, and it's a sin to waste it. Do you never wish for the things you've missed? Seventy-five dollars a week—can a man live on that?"

"Some live on less," Eddie said. His voice was unsteady; he couldn't seem to lower his eyes from Joe Mahoney's.

"Ah," the fat man said quietly, "let the slaves and the fools take that. Let them rot that were made to rot! You're not one of them, boy. You've got your father's head, and it's shown you things. They give you a gun, and a few rotten dollars; and you'd risk your life for them. Why?"

"It's my job," Eddie said. "But nothing ever—"

"It was Ed Mahoney's job too. D'ye think he'd do it the same way again, if he had the chance?" Putting his hands on the table edge, he leaned his body forward between them. "If you got a call in the morning, at half-past ten, before you went out with the pay roll—a call about Ed, let us say, that would be from the hospital—they'd send no one in your place. There'd be but two men to go to the store—the guard and the messenger. It could happen you'd get that call, boy. It could happen that afterward you'd get more money—"

"Listen," Eddie said. His eyes were dangerous, and then something changed in them, something changed in himself. He felt it as a flow of weakness—a sudden, thick flood that left him without words. Joe Mahoney bent forward from his chair, was silent a moment. Then he laughed again.

"What's in your mind?" he asked. "Is it taking me seriously you are? Go to bed, boy. You need some rest. You're tired and worked out. A night's sleep will fix you up."

But a long while after, in his room, Eddie was still awake, remembering that the laughter had never touched Joe Mahoney's eyes.

In the morning he was gone before Eddie awoke. There was a scrawled note on the table that said something about a job and an ap-

pointment downtown. But even as he picked it up Eddie knew what it meant.

He called the hospital mechanically. There was nothing new; Mr. Mahoney had spent a comfortable night. Then he made some coffee, in the kitchen, and went downtown in the subway.

At ten o'clock he started to work on the pay roll. The heaviness inside him seemed not to affect that; he ran the figures off quickly and without error, and together with Barnes the messenger he stowed the bills tightly away in the bag. They were nearly through when one of the tellers came in.

"Mr. Stone wants to see you," he said.

Mr. Stone was standing in the office, by his desk. He said quietly, "They just called from the hospital. Collins couldn't find you, and asked for the message. I'm damned sorry, Eddie. Your father was a fine man."

"The hospital?" Eddie said. He thought this would be Joe Mahoney; it was just twenty-five past ten. He could tell Mr. Stone now, and—

"His heart," Mr. Stone said. "There was nothing they could do; he'd been too weakened."

For a moment Eddie had the strangest feeling that it was true, that the old man really— All he did was grin foolishly at Mr. Stone, to nod his head at the other man's words. Then he was out in the cor-

ridor, and someone yelled, "Mahoney! Phone."

"Eddie?" Joe Mahoney said. "I'm at the hospital. Poor Ed is bad. He wants to see you. Will you come right over?"

"You called already," Eddie said. "You called just now."

"Me?" Joe Mahoney's voice broke a little, nervously. "What are you saying? Five minutes I've waited to get in the damn' booth. Hurry now. Poor Ed—"

His words lost themselves as Eddie put down the phone. If Joe Mahoney hadn't called the first time, the hospital had. His heart—there was something Dr. Lincoln had said about the condition of his heart. It had to hold out; because if it didn't—

Barnes came in with the bag in his hand. "Okay," he said. "Time to get started, Eddie."

They met Langford the guard at the cage door and walked out together through the long stone lobby to the street. It was a bright day of wind and sunshine; the streets were crowded, traffic passed, a boy went by them whistling, the bag made little thumps on Barnes's leg with every step he took.

Bill Langford looked at Eddie curiously as they turned into the entrance of Markham's. He said, "What's the matter with you? You look dopey."

Then the elevator doors closed on them, and they moved upward.

The floors dropped past them smoothly, numbered, monotonous, stupid, like the years of Mahoney the cop's life. That had been a shaft too; he'd never got out of it. Forty-two, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five, forty-six—that's where his shaft had stopped. That's where it ended.

What had he wanted? He'd believed in something that wasn't true, and that he knew wasn't true. Yet he'd held on to it. Why? What was there in it for him? Mahoney the cop, who couldn't talk any more, or listen—who was lying somewhere now, finished and done. A sad life and a short one, a wasted one too. Because—

When the elevator stopped Eddie got out before the others and saw Joe Mahoney standing at the wall desk ten feet away, facing him. There was a man by the elevators—a short man with a strained white face, who put out one hand and touched the down button as soon as they got off.

Joe Mahoney was pale too; his small eyes narrowed and glittered when he saw Eddie. Casually, not too fast, he walked toward them at a right angle to their way, so that he'd meet them just before they came to the cashier's door. Watching him, for a moment Eddie forgot the other man.

He must have moved up behind them, and smashed his gun against Bill Langford's head. The guard fell forward limply, into Eddie,

rolling off him to the floor. And then Joe Mahoney had a gun pressed into Barnes's stomach, had the bag out of Barnes's hand.

Still the only thing Eddie thought of was Mahoney the cop coming around the corner, swinging his club—a big man as solid and steady as a rock, so vivid that for an instant he winked at Eddie, in the habitual gesture that was his smile.

There was no reason for Eddie to pull his gun; even as he did, he knew no one would ever blame him. Before he had it out the short man fired at him, snarling, and his hat jerked off his head as if a hand had caught it. And then he fired, and the short man's hat stayed on his head; it didn't roll off till he hit the floor, and shuddered a little, and moved one hand in a feebly groping motion across the cold marble.

Joe Mahoney ran. An elevator door had opened at the end of the corridor, and while he ran for it time stretched out; it was so intolerably long that before he was halfway to the door Eddie had his gun raised and leveled. He wouldn't miss; he couldn't. Now—

He didn't fire. Something heavy and moving, striking his legs, knocked him off balance. There was report over report from the floor at his feet, from Bill Langford's prone body twisted catlike now to face the elevators. Joe Mahoney reached the open door and

pitched through it, all but his legs. From the knees down they sprawled outside, the soles balanced awkwardly on the narrow-pointed tips of his shoes. They wobbled a bit and then they stopped, tipped over on their sides.

Eddie followed Bill Langford down to them, and looked in over the guard's shoulder. A woman passenger screamed; the operator stayed frozen motionless against the wall of the cage, his eyes held downward. "Boy," Bill Langford said, breathing heavily. "Dead center. Twice. He's stiff as a ball bat, Eddie."

"Yes," Eddie said.

The fact was meaningless. Joe Mahoney, on the floor of the elevator, meant nothing to him, conveyed nothing, left nothing; he was not even a stranger. Everything he had, everything he was, had died with him. It was a death different from Mahoney the cop's, who had left something at the end after all—as fragile as mist perhaps—but as enduring as memory, too. Something that if you did not see it, you would feel forever in the heart.

Kathleen was waiting at the hospital when he got there an hour later. Her father, she said, had called her this morning; and she'd wanted to be there when he came. But Eddie went in alone to the old man, and stayed a long while in the quiet room, his hat in his hands,

his mind quiet, too, steady within him.

When he came out at last to Kathleen it was strange to think that he'd almost lost her, that in the end it was the old man who had saved her for him. Palm Beach, girls, money, fun, moonlight—Kathleen's small dark face, the touch of her fingers in his, made those other things words now, fantastic and incredible. They had no place with her, or with himself. Was it Kathleen who had changed them, or the old man? There was no way of tell-

ing, but it did not matter greatly. They had changed; that was the important thing, the thing that mattered.

At the desk they met Inspector Bohannon, from Mahoney the cop's old precinct. "Are you—?" he asked, clearing his throat and looking at Eddie. "Are you—?"

"Yes," Eddie said, not as if he were explaining to them, but to himself—as if it was so clear in him now that he could never question it again. "Yes. I'm Ed Mahoney's boy."

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AUTHOR: **JOHN DENVER**

TITLE: ***The End Never in Sight***

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Parrish

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A story with heart—a story that has special meaning for all of us today.*

WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED, Lieutenant Parrish spent only a few minutes at the scene of the tragedy. He examined the blood smear on the rock, contemplated the sheer fifty-foot drop into the Pacific where, it was said, an undertow swept clear out to China, and let his eye follow down along the rest of the path that ended at the beach far below.

He admired the manner in which nature had fenced off the sandy swimming area with rock shelvings, making it completely safe, and was critical of the human carelessness that had left the one dangerous spot in the path unguarded—not even a stake to clutch at if you slipped.

A comparatively quick once-over—only long enough to determine that a search of the vicious waters below would be not only impos-

sible but useless. Then he went back into the house where Martha Venters sat motionless and stricken on an impressive, modernistic lounge. Laurie Venters, the daughter, was not in the room.

Martha Venters had been weeping when Parrish had left, but finding her now dry-eyed did not strike him as extraordinary. He had learned during his years of contact with this sort of thing that there is a rhythm to grief, that it functions in waves, that just as there is a rhythm in the stars and the seasons and the breath there is a similar rise and fall in the pattern of human emotion.

Martha Venters acknowledged his return with a gesture of her wadded handkerchief. She said, "Please take the needlepoint chair, Lieutenant. It's very comfortable."

Parrish obeyed but he knew he

would not be comfortable—the chair looked too expensive to sit in. “It was just as you said,” he told her. “The blood, the towel lying there. I’m sorry.”

Martha Venters was not ready for more tears. She crushed her handkerchief and said, He’d worked so hard to get the things he wanted us to have. And we had such plans for the future. He was such a wonderful man—a finer father never lived—or a finer husband.”

“I’m sure he was.” Parrish had a few questions but there was no great hurry. It was better to let her talk as normally as she could. “You must have been very happy together.”

“No two people were ever happier. Planning, doing, sharing. I remember when Laurie came. We lived down in the City then. And we didn’t have very much, really. That was when we decided this house just *had* to be ours.”

“It’s a beautiful place.”

“I’d come up to look at it several times. Even when I was carrying Laurie and really shouldn’t have, I would come up and then go home and tell Sam some more about it.” Martha Venters was able to smile a little now, at the memory. “For a while we were even afraid to ask the price with Sam only an assistant manager at Marble’s. But there in the hospital, with Laurie cuddled close to me, so cute and precious, I said, ‘Sam, we’ve

just *got* to have Cliff House now, I can still remember his look of surprise.”

“Surprise?”

“Yes. You see he’d never heard that name for it before. I named it myself, there in the hospital. And that was strange, too. It was right in the middle of my worst labor pains, when I had to have something to take my mind off them. That was when it came to me. ‘We’ll call it Cliff House,’ I told myself.”

Martha Venters looked suddenly at Parrish, her eyes lit with a false brightness he was familiar with—grief aglow behind the daze of great shock. “Why on earth am I telling you all this? I should be ashamed.”

“Not at all,” he said gently. This was another thing sudden tragedy did to people. The mind turns its back, seeks to hide behind treasured memories. Parrish had seen people under stress—especially, accident victims—babble their innermost secrets to complete strangers.

He regarded Martha Venters thoughtfully and asked, “How was your husband’s health? Did he have any chronic ailments? Any illness—?”

“Good heavens, no! Sam was as strong as a horse. As I was telling you—about when Laurie was born—I said, ‘Sam, we’ve just got to have Cliff House now,’ and he looked at Laurie so proudly and straightened his shoulders and said,

'We *will* have it. There is some night work I can get.' That was in the late 'thirties when things were picking up. I would have tried to talk him out of taking on the extra work but I knew my Sam. When he made up his mind to anything—

"So he began carrying two jobs and I guess that was how he got into the habit of the long hours he never broke away from. Fifteen, even eighteen hours a day was nothing for Sam. Later when he went into his own business—"

Martha Venters stopped and looked suddenly over at Parrish and he wondered if more tears were coming now. But she was only confused. "What—what were we talking about? Oh—oh, yes. You asked about Sam's health. He was tiring more easily, I guess. He was fifty-three, you know. But actually he was like a young man. He even did work himself on the new pool. Said he needed the exercise."

"I noticed it out there. Quite extensive."

"And very expensive with labor costs so high. But we wanted it for Laurie with the beach so far down and the ocean not fit for swimming half the time. She is older now and so many young people come visiting. As I told Sam, she's seventeen and parents have an obligation. If you don't want to have your children off somewhere running wild, you've got to meet them halfway—give them a nice place to have their friends in. That's why we always

considered the house, the landscaping, even the tennis court, as investments in her future."

Laurie Venters entered the room at that moment. Martha Venters looked at her with tenderness and extended a hand and drew the girl down beside her. Laurie looked older than seventeen, but it occurred to Parrish that all juveniles seemed to leap over their true years these days.

It was difficult to tell whether Laurie had wept or not. She had beautiful, well-tended eyes and an arrestingly attractive face—one, Parrish thought, not indicative of many tears or much laughter. A rather stern face, really, with everything about it suggesting practical alertness.

She slipped her hand out of her mother's and said, "I suppose we'll have to start economizing now."

It seemed a cruel, boorish remark even from a youngster, but Parrish was still inclined to be lenient and attribute it to pressure.

Martha Venters overlooked it also. She said to Parrish, "I imagine we are considered well off, but it isn't true. If you want the least little thing today in the way of a home or a little modest luxury, it takes every dime you make. Actually, Lieutenant, we're in debt."

There was a question that had to be asked and now Parrish asked it. "Was there any reason whatever—any chance that Mr. Venters committed suicide?"

This was the trigger. Martha Venters dissolved into tears. Laurie frowned at Parrish and took her mother's hand in hers. "Was that necessary?"

"I'm sorry, but I do have to get the facts."

"The answer to your question is, *no*. My father was a hard-working, well-balanced person. And above all, he wasn't a coward. He wouldn't deliberately leave his wife and daughter to take care of themselves."

"I see."

"He must have been tired and—and, well, careless. He knew that place in the path was dangerous. In fact, I suggested to him several times that he have a fence put up."

Martha Venters was recovering now. She regarded her daughter tenderly. "Maybe we will have to at least delay finishing the pool, dear. But we'll be able to keep the place on Lake Sunrise."

"I think we should sell it, Mother. Actually it was the only unwise investment Father ever made."

"A cabin Sam bought although I tried to talk him out of it," Martha Venters explained. "No improvements. Hopelessly primitive. I only agreed when he promised that he would improve it and make it livable. But he never seemed to be able to get the money together."

"I wonder if you'd mind telling me," Parrish said. "Just how much insurance is there?"

"Fifty thousand dollars. But Sam

borrowed against it. I don't really know how much is left."

Laurie Venters frowned at Parrish. "And now if there are no more questions, I think my mother is entitled to a little privacy in her grief."

Parrish got up from the needle-point chair. "Yes," he said, "I'm sorry I had to intrude."

He went out of the house and back to the dangerous turn in the beach path. It hadn't changed. He knelt and looked closely at the blood smear on the sharp edge of the boulder, at the blood-smearred towel lying beside it hanging half over the sheer drop.

Directly below, the Pacific boiled, and farther on to the left it curled gently in on the sand beach—on the beach toward which Sam Venters had been moving when disaster struck.

Lieutenant Parrish looked out across the water to the sun, still a couple of feet above the horizon; then he walked away, got into his car, and began driving away from the ocean and up into the hills.

Darkness had fallen when he arrived at Lake Sunrise an hour later. He circled slowly, reading the names on fences and mailboxes with the police car spotlight until he found the one he was looking for. He got out of the car and moved up the walk toward a small cottage.

A man in a white shirt sat on the front steps. The man said, "Good

evening," and Parrish said, "I'm looking for Mr. Venters."

"I'm Sam Venters."

"Mind if I sit down?"

"Certainly not."

"I'm Lieutenant Parrish. You gave your family quite a scare."

"I'm sorry."

Parrish lit a cigarette and waited. If there was no rush about things it was better to let them do the talking.

"Can I get you a beer or something?"

"No—no, thanks," Parrish said. "This is fine."

"I guess I *was* expecting you—someone—but not right on my heels. Clever police work—to know right where I was."

"Not at all. Just a routine check."

"You weren't sure, then?"

"No. It was just one of three possibilities. The likeliest perhaps, but still just one of three possibilities."

"That's interesting."

"There was a chance of murder—but the odds were against it. Also the chance of accident—that you'd slipped and fallen."

"The murder angle never occurred to me. But I thought I had made the indications of accident quite obvious."

With his eyes adjusting, Parrish could now see a small stout man with drooping shoulders and hands clasped tight together. Parrish said, "There was one thing against it—the blood on the towel. If you'd fallen and hit your head on the

rock you could have dropped the towel before you went over—but there would have been no reason for blood on it."

Sam Venters did not reply immediately; when he did he seemed to be talking more to himself than to Parrish. "Martha and Laurie were both away for the afternoon and I'd been doing a little work on the swimming pool. When I finished I went in the house and shaved—that was where the blood came from. I cut my neck and I bleed easily. I used the towel on it. Then I put on my swimming suit under my trousers and started down to the beach to cool off. As a matter of fact, I did slip there on the path."

"It could happen—it's a bad spot."

"I stood looking down into that cauldron and—" He suddenly appealed to Parrish. "When I started from the house I had no idea of doing what I did. I was just feeling generally low. But sometimes—when things are just right for it—an idea doesn't have to be thought up. It's there waiting—been waiting a long time."

"I know what you mean."

"The water boiling around down there and no one in sight and then I suddenly got scared of myself at how nice and peaceful it all looked. That was the beginning. Next I saw myself for what I really am—a man past middle age who's worked like a Chinese coolie all my

life and nothing to show for it."

"I don't quite follow that. A beautiful home, a family—"

"What I mean is, no chance to stop—not even for a breather. Up and at it every day or your world caves in. What I mean, Parrish, a man's life has to be pointed toward some end—a place where he can say to himself, 'Now I've got it made. Now I can sit back and slow down a little.' But that isn't the way it is with me, or with the world these days. There's always something more to sweat for. A bigger house, another car, a tennis court, a swimming pool—with the end never in sight."

Venters took a deep breath. "And standing there on the cliff path I suddenly got bone-tired, 'way down inside." He shrugged and Parrish sensed a wry grimace. "Or maybe I just turned chicken. Anyhow, I walked back through the house and put on a shirt and on out the front and climbed on a bus. And here I am."

"You were going to vanish? Just disappear?"

"I don't really know. I wasn't sure the 'fatal accident' would work. I was going to get away from here tomorrow and then wait and see. Or at least that was what I told myself I would do—wait and see if the newspapers an-

nounced my death, and then make the decision."

There was a full minute of silence. Parrish ground out a cigarette with his heel. Then Venters got suddenly to his feet.

"No, I wasn't going to just disappear. That would have been silly. I've got a good wife and a fine daughter who need me. Laurie's just beginning. There's so much I still have to give her. And I've got a whole lot of good years in me yet. A whole lot."

"Of course you have."

"How do I stand with the law?"

Parrish shrugged. "No crime has been committed."

"Will you drive me back?"

"Certainly."

As they got into the car, Venters asked, "What are you going to tell Martha?"

"Nothing," the Lieutenant replied. "There's really no reason why I should even see her again." He got in behind the wheel. "What will you tell her?"

"I don't know yet."

And then, just before Venters closed the door and the light went off, Parrish saw something in his eyes—a look of grim, pent-up anger.

"Maybe—for once," Venters said, "for just *once*—she'll have sense enough not to ask."



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Crime Story

LOCALE:

Nikolaieff, South Russia

TIME:

About 30 years ago

COMMENTS:

How famous stories sometimes fade! A generation ago this was a "classic tale"—now it is almost forgotten . . . Surely it deserves rescue from bibliovion.

THE OFFICE OF THE MACHINE-TOOL agency, where Mr. Barzan sat bowed and intent over his desk, was still as a chapel on that afternoon of early autumn. The pale South Russian sun, shining full on its windows, did no more than touch with color the sober shadows.

From the single room of the American Vice-Consulate, across the narrow staircase-landing, there came to Mr. Barzan the hum of indistinguishable voices that touched his consciousness without troubling it. Then suddenly, with an organ effect, as though a door had been flung open between him and the speakers, he heard a single voice that babbled and faltered in noisy, shrill anger.

"Out o' this—out o' this!" It was the unmistakable voice of Selby, the Vice-Consul, whose routine day was incomplete without a quarrel. "Call yourself an American—you! Coming in here—"

The voice ceased abruptly. Mr. Barzan at his desk moved slightly, like one who disposes of a trivial interruption, and bent again to the matter before him. Between his large white hands, each decorated with a single ring, he held a small oblong box, the size of a cigar case, of that blue lacquer of which Russian craftsmen once alone possessed the secret. Battered now by base uses, tarnished and abraded, it preserved yet, for such eyes as Mr. Barzan's, clues to its ancient delicacy of

surface and the glory of its sky-rivaling blue.

He had found it an hour before on a tobacconist's counter, containing matches, and had bought it for a few kopecks; and now alone in his office, amid his catalogues of lathes and punches, he was poring over it, reading it as another man might read poetry, inhaling from it all that the artist, its maker, had breathed into it.

There was a telephone at work in the Vice-Consulate now—a voice speaking in staccato bursts. Mr. Barzan sighed gently, lifting the box for the light to slide on its surface. He was a large man, nearing his fiftieth year, and a quiet self-security, a quality of being at home in the world, was the chief of his effects. On the wide spaces of his face the little and neat features were grouped concisely—a nose boldly curved, but small and well-modeled, a mouth at once sensuous and fastidious, and eyes steadfast and benign. A dozen races between the Caspian and the Vistula had fused to produce this machine-tool agent; and over the union of them there was spread, like a preservative varnish, the smoothness of an imperturbable placidity.

Footsteps crossed the landing and there was a loud knock on his door. Before Mr. Barzan, deliberate always, could reply, it was pushed open and Selby, the Vice-Consul, his hair awry, his glasses askew on the high, thin bridge of his nose,

and with all his general air of a maddened bird, stood on the threshold.

"Ah, Selby, it is you, my friend!" remarked Mr. Barzan pleasantly. "And you wish to see me—yes?"

Selby advanced into the room, saving his glasses by a sudden clutch.

"Say, Barzan," he shrilled, "here's a heck of a thing! This place gets worse every day. Fellow comes into my office—kind of a peddler, selling rugs and carpets—and shows a sort of passport. Armenian, I guess, or a Persian or something; and when I tell him to clear out, damned if he doesn't go and throw a kind of a fit right on my floor."

"Ah!" said Mr. Barzan sympathetically. "A fit—yes? You have telephoned for the *Gorodski Pomosh*—the town ambulance?"

"Yes," said Selby. "At least, I had Miss Pilgrim do that—my clerk, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Barzan, "I know Miss Pilgrim. Well, I will come and see your peddler." He rose. "But first—see what I have been buying for myself, Selby."

He held out the little battered box. "You like it? I gave forty kopecks for it to a man who would have taken twenty. It is nice—yes?"

Selby gazed at it vaguely. "Very nice," he said perfunctorily. "I used to buy 'em too when I first came here."

Mr. Barzan smiled that quiet,

friendly smile of his and put the box carefully into a drawer of his desk.

The American Vice-Consulate at Nikolaieff was housed in a single great room lighted by a large window at one end, overlooking the port and the wharves; so that, entering from the gloom of the little landing, one looked along the length of it as toward the mouth of a cave. Desks, tables, and a typewriter was all its gear; it was a place as aridly specialized for its purpose as an iron foundry; but now, for the moment, it was redeemed from its everyday barrenness by the two figures on the floor.

The peddler lay at full length, a bundle of strange travel-wrecked clothes, suggesting a lay figure in his limp alertness and the loose sprawl of his limbs. Beside him on the boards, trim in white shirtwaist and tweed skirt, knelt the Vice-Consul's clerk, Miss Pilgrim. She had one arm under the man's head and with the other was drawing toward her his fallen bundle of rugs to serve as a pillow. As she bent, her gentle face, luminously fair, was over the swart clenched countenance of the unconscious man, whose stagnant eyes seemed set on her in an unwinking stare.

Mr. Barzan bent to help her place the bundle in position. She lifted her face to him in recognition. Selby, fretting to and fro, snorted.

"Damned if I'd have touched him," he said. "Most likely he never

saw soap in his life. A hobo, that's what he is—just a hobo."

Miss Pilgrim gave a deprecating smile and stood up. She was a slight girl, serious and gentle, and half her waking life was spent in counteracting the effects of Selby's indigestion and ill-temper. Mr. Barzan was still stooping over the bundle of rugs.

"Oh, that'll be all right, Mr. Barzan," she assured him. "He's quite comfortable now."

Mr. Barzan looked up at her.

"I am seeing the kind of rugs he has," he answered. "I am interested in rugs. You do not know rugs—no?"

"No," replied Miss Pilgrim.

"Ah! This, now, is out of Persia, I think," said Mr. Barzan, edging one loose from the disordered bundle. "Think!" he said. "This poor fellow, lying here—he is Armenian. How many years he has walked, carrying his carpets and rugs, all the way down into Persia, selling and changing his goods in bazaars and caravansaries, and then back over the Caucasus, across the Black Lands—carrying the rugs till he comes to throw his fit on Mr. Selby's floor! It is a strange way to live, Miss Pilgrim—yes?"

"Ye-es," breathed Miss Pilgrim, "ye-es."

He smiled at her. He had a corner of the rug unfolded now and draped over his bent knee. His hand stroked it delicately; the blank light from the window let its

coloring show in its just values. Mr. Barzan, with the dregs of his smile curving his lips, scanned it without too much appearance of interest. He was known as a "collector," a man who gathered things that others disregarded, and both Miss Pilgrim and Selby watched him with the respect of the laity for the initiate. But they could not discern or share the mounting ecstasy of the connoisseur as he realized the truth and power of the coloring, its stained-glass glow, the strength of the patterning, and the authentic silk-and-steel of the texture.

"Is it any good?" asked Selby suddenly. "I've heard of 'em being worth a lot sometimes, thousands of dollars."

"Sometimes," agreed Mr. Barzan. "Those you can see in museums. This one, now, I would offer him twenty rubles for it, and I would give perhaps thirty if he bargained too hard. That is because I have a place for it in my house."

"And he'd probably make a hundred per cent. on it at that," said Selby. "These fellows—"

The loud feet of the ambulance men on the stairs interrupted him. Mr. Barzan, dragging the partly unfolded rug with him, moved away as the doctor and his retinue of stretcher bearers came in at the door.

Mr. Barzan saw the doctor kneel down beside the prostrate man and Miss Pilgrim hand him one of the

office tea glasses; then, while all crowded round to watch the process of luring back the strayed soul of the peddler; he had leisure to assure himself again of the quality of his find.

"A spoon, somebody!" snapped the doctor. The cramped throat gurgled painfully; but Mr. Barzan, slave to the delight of the eye, was unheeding. A joy akin to love, that pervaded and rejoiced his every faculty, had possession of him. The carpet was all he had deemed it and more, in the perfect expression of its fine and pure beauty.

The peddler on the floor behind him groaned painfully and tatters of speech formed on his lips. "That's better," said the doctor encouragingly. Mr. Barzan dropped the rug and moved quietly toward the group.

The man was conscious again; a stretcher bearer, kneeling behind him, was holding him in a half-sitting posture; and Mr. Barzan watched with interest how the tide of returning intelligence mounted in the thin mask of his face.

The peddler was an Armenian by every evidence—an effect of weather-beaten pallor appearing through dense masses of coal-black beard and hair; one of those timid and servile offscourings of civilization whose wandering lives are daily epics of horrid peril and adventure. His pale eyes roved here and there as he lay against the stretcher bearer's knee.

"Well," said the doctor, rising and dusting his hands one against the other, "We won't need the stretcher. Two of you take him under the arms and help him up."

The burly Russian ambulance men hoisted him easily enough and stood supporting him, while he hung between them weakly. Still his eyes wandered, seeking dumbly in the big room. The doctor turned to speak to the Vice-Consul and Miss Pilgrim moved forward to the sick man.

"Yes??" she questioned in her uncertain Russian. "Yes? What is it?"

He made feeble sounds, but Mr. Barzan heard no shaped word. Miss Pilgrim, however, seemed to understand.

"Oh, your rugs!" she answered "They're all here, quite safe." She pointed to the bundle, lying where it had been thrust aside. "Quite safe, you see."

Mr. Barzan said no word. The silken carpet that he had removed was out of sight on the farther side of the big central table of the office.

The peddler groaned again and murmured. Miss Pilgrim bent forward. Mr. Barzan, quietly and deliberately, as always, moved to join the conference of the doctor and Selby. He was making a third to their conversation when Miss Pilgrim turned.

"One more?" she was saying. "Is there one more? Mr. Barzan, did you—oh, there it is!"

She moved across to fetch it, the peddler's eyes following her slavishly. Mr. Barzan smiled.

"Yes?" he said. "Oh, that carpet! He wants to sell it—yes?"

"He isn't fit to do any bargaining yet," replied Miss Pilgrim; and Mr. Barzan nodded agreeably.

The doctor and Selby finished their talk, and the former came back into the grouping. "Well, take him down to the ambulance," he bade the men.

They moved to obey; but the sick man, mouthing strange sounds, seemed to try to hang back, making gestures with his head toward the disregarded bundle that was the whole of his earthly wealth.

"What's the matter with him?" cried the doctor impatiently. "Those rugs? Oh, we can't take a hotbed of microbes like that to the hospital! Move him along, there!"

"And I'm not going to have 'em here," barked Selby.

The peddler, limp between the big stretcher bearers, moaned and seemed to shiver in a vain effort to free himself.

"Wait, please!" Miss Pilgrim came forward. She had been folding the silken rug of Mr. Barzan's choice and was now carrying it before her; it was as though she wore an apron of dawn gold and sunset red. The pitiful man rolled meek, imploring eyes on her. She cast down the rug she carried on the others in their bundle and stood over them.

"I will take care of them," she

said. "They will be safe with me. Do you understand me? Me!" She touched herself upon her white-clad bosom with one hand, pointing with the other to the rugs.

The man gazed at her mournfully, resignedly. Martyrdom was the daily bread of his race; oppression had been his apprenticeship to life. It was in the order of things as he knew it that those who had power over him should plunder him; but facing the earnest girl, with her frank and kindly eyes, some glimmer of hope lit in his abjectness. He sighed and let his head fall forward in a feeble motion of acquiescence; and the big men who held him took him out and carried him down the stairs to the waiting ambulance.

"Well!" said Selby, as the door closed behind the doctor. "Who wouldn't sell a farm and be a consul? We ought to have the place disinfected. What do you expect to do with that junk, Miss Pilgrim?"

Miss Pilgrim was readjusting the thong that had bound the rugs together. "Oh, I'll take them home in a droshky, Mr. Selby," she said. "I've got a cupboard in my rooms where they can stay till the poor man gets out of hospital."

"All right," said Selby. "It's your headache." He turned away, but stopped on a sudden thought. "What about letting Barzan take that rug now?" he asked. "He's offered a price, and he can pay it to you."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Barzan. "I can pay the cash to Miss Pilgrim and she can pay it to the poor man. He will perhaps be glad to have some cash at once when he comes out."

Miss Pilgrim, kneeling beside the pack of rugs, looked doubtfully from one to the other. Mr. Barzan returned her gaze benignly. Selby, as always, had the affronted air of one who is prepared to be refused the most just and modern demand. "Why," she began, hesitatingly, "I suppose—"

Then the hesitancy on Miss Pilgrim's face melted and she positively brightened.

"What can I have been thinking of?" she said. "When the poor man comes out, Mr. Barzan can make his own bargain with him; but till then—I promised!"

Selby, with slipping glasses awry on his nose, gaped at her. "Promised!" he repeated. "To that hobo—"

Mr. Barzan intervened. "But Miss Pilgrim is quite right. She promised, and it is only two or three days to wait, and also it is not the only rug in the world. Though," he added generously, "it is a nice rug—yes?"

Miss Pilgrim smiled at him gratefully. Selby shrugged and just caught his glasses as the shrug shook them loose. "Suit yourselves," he said, and moved across the room toward his untidy desk by the window.

The pale autumn sun had dissolved in watery splendor as Mr. Barzan, with the wide astrachan collar of his overcoat turned up, walked homeward in the brisk evening chill. There were lights along the wharves, and the broad waters of the port, along which his road lay, were freckled with the spark-like lanterns on the ships, each with its little shimmer of radiance reflected from the stream.

Commonly, as he strolled, he saw it all with gladness—the world and the fullness thereof were ministers of his pleasure; but this night he saw it absently, with eyes that dwelt beyond it all. Outwardly he was the usual Mr. Barzan. His slightly sluggish benevolence of demeanor was unchanged as he returned the salute of a policeman on a corner. But inwardly he was like a man uplifted by good news. The sense of pure beauty, buried in his being, stirred like a rebellious slave; those arabesques, that coloring, that texture, thrilled him like a gospel.

It was in the same mood that he let himself into his apartment in the great German-built house that overlooked the boulevard and the thronged river. He laid aside his overcoat in the little hall, conventional with its waxed wood and its mirror, clicked an electric-light switch, and passed through a portière into the salon, which was the chief room of his abode—a large room, oblong and high-ceilinged, designed by a man with palace ar-

chitecture, that obsession of the Russian architect, on the brain. He advanced into it, still with that vagueness of sense, and stopped very quietly, looking around him.

It was part of the effect which Mr. Barzan made on those who came into contact with him that few suspected him of a domesticity of his own; he was so complete, so compactly self-contained, without appanages of that kind.

Here, however, was the frame of his real existence, which contained it as a frame contains a picture and threw it into relief. The great room, under the strong lights, showed the conventional desert of polished parquet floor, with sparse furniture grouped about it. There was an ivory-inlaid stand with a Benares brass tray; a Circassian bridal linen chest stood against a wall; the tiles of the stove in the corner illustrated the life and martyrdom of Saint Tychon. On another wall was a trophy of old Cossack swords. Before the linen chest stood a trunk of the kind that every Russian housemaid takes with her to her employment—a thing of bent birchwood, fantastically painted in strong reds and blues. One buys such things for the price of a cock-tail.

Mr. Barzan stood looking round him at the room. Everything in it was of his choosing, the trophy of some moment or some hour of delight. He had selected his own background.

"Ah—Samuell!" came a voice.

He turned, deliberate always. Between the portières that screened the opposite doorway stood the supreme "find" of his collection. Somewhere or other, between the processes of becoming an emperor in the machine-tool trade of Southern Russia and an American citizen, Mr. Barzan—so complete in himself, so perfect an entity—had added to himself a wife. The taste that manifested itself alike on battered blue lacquer and worn prayer rugs from Persia had not failed him then; he had found a thing perfect of its kind.

From the uneasy Caucasus, where the harem furnishers of Circassia jostle the woman merchants of Georgia, he had brought back a prize. The woman who stood in the doorway—one strong bare arm uplifted to hold back the stamped leather curtain—was a great white creature like a moving statue, with a still, blank face framed in shining jet hair. The strong lights of the chamber shone on her; she stood, still as an image, with large incurious eyes. All the Orient was immanent in her; she had the quiet, the resignation, the un-hope of the odalisk.

"Samuel," she said again.

"Ah, Adina!" And then, in the Circassian idiom, "Grace go before you!"

Her white arm sank and the curtains swelled together behind her. Mr. Barzan took the chief of his

treasures into his arms and kissed her.

The room in which presently they dined was tiny like a *cabinet particulier*. They sat at food like lovers, with shutters closed on the windows to defend their privacy. Mr. Barzan ate largely, and his wife watched him across the table with still satisfaction.

The linen on the table had been woven by the nuns of the Lavra at Kieff; the soup bowls were from Cracow. There was nothing in the place that had not its quality and distinction. And Mr. Barzan fitted it as a snail fits its shell. It *was* his shell; for like a snail, he had exuded it from his being and it was part of him.

"I saw a carpet today," he said abruptly. There was Black Sea salmon on his plate and he spoke above a laden fork.

"Yes?" The big, quiet woman did not so much inquire as invite him to continue.

Mr. Barzan ate some salmon. "A carpet—yes," he said presently. "Real—like diamonds—like you, Adina."

At the compliment she lowered her head and raised it again, in a motion like a very slow nod. Mr. Barzan finished his salmon without further words.

"And—?" At her unfinished question he looked up.

"Yes," he said, "surely! In a few days I shall bring it home."

Her large eyes, the docile eyes of

the slave-wife, acclaimed him. For her there were no doubts, no judgments; the husband was the master, the god of the house. Mr. Barzan continued his meal to its end.

"And now," he said presently, when he had finished, "you will go to bed."

She stood up, revealing again her majestic stature and pose. Mr. Barzan sat at his end of the table with his tiny cup of coffee and his thimble-like glass before him. He lifted his eyes and gazed at her appreciatively, and for a moment there lit in his face a reflection of what Selby and Miss Pilgrim might have seen in it, had they known how to look, when first he realized the silken glories of the carpet. The woman, returning his gaze, maintained her pale, submissive calm.

"Blessings upon you," he said, dismissing her.

She lowered her splendid head in instant obedience.

"Blessings," she replied. "Have sweet sleep, lord and husband!"

He sat above his coffee and his liqueur and watched her superb body pass forth from the little room. She did not turn to look back; they are not trained to coquetry, those chattel-women of the Caucasus.

Mr. Barzan smiled while he let the sweetish and violently strong liqueur roll over his tongue and the assertively fragrant coffee possess his senses. His wife was truly a "find," a thing perfect of its sort,

that satisfied his exigent taste; and now again he was to thrill with the joy of acquisition.

There were rugs in the room—one draped over a settee, another hanging on the wall opposite him, one underfoot—each fine and singular in its manner. He passed an eye over them and then ceased to see them. His benevolent face with all its quiet shrewdness fell vague with reverie; it was in absence of mind rather than in presence of appetite that he helped himself for the fourth time to the high-explosive liqueur from the old Vilna decanter; and there flushed into sight before him, the clearer for the spur with which the potent drink roweled his consciousness, the vision of the silk carpet, its glow, as though fire were mixed with the dyes of it, the faultless rightness and art of its pattern, the soul-ensnaring perfection of the whole.

It was some hours later that he looked into his wife's room. She was asleep, her quiet head cushioned on the waves of her hair. Mr. Barzan, half-burned cigar between his teeth, stood and gazed at her. Her face, wiped clean of its powder, was white as paper, with that death-like whiteness which counts as beauty in Circassia; only the shadows of her eyelids and the broad red of her lips stained her pallor. Across her breast the red-and-blue hem of the quilt lay like a scarf.

Mr. Barzan looked at the ar-

rangement critically. He was a connoisseur in perfection and something was lacking. It eluded him for a moment or two and then suddenly, like an inspiration, he perceived it. The rug—the thing delicate as silk, with its sheen, its flush of lines, with the white, slumbering face above it! The perfect thing—he saw it!

The woman in bed stirred and murmured.

"Blessings upon you," said Mr. Barzan, and smiled as he turned away.

"Bl-essings," she murmured sleepily, without opening her eyes, and sighed and lay still once more.

The heart of a man is a battleground, where might is always right and victory is always to the strongest of the warring passions. And even a saint's passion to holiness is scarcely stronger, more selfless, more disregarding of obstacles than the passion of the lover of the beautiful, the connoisseur, toward acquisition.

In the days that followed, Mr. Barzan, walking his quiet ways about the city, working in the stillness of his office, acquired the sense that the carpet, by the mere force of his desire, was somehow due to him—a thing only momentarily out of his hands, like one's brief loan to a friend.

Presently it would come his way and be his; and it belongs to his sense of security in his right that

not once, not even when he remembered it most avidly, did he think of the expedient of buying it from the sick peddler by paying him the value of it.

Another man would probably have gone to Selby, told him the secret, and enlisted his aid; but Mr. Barzan did not work like that. He allowed chance a week in which to show its reasonableness; and not till then, nothing having happened, did he furnish himself one afternoon with an excuse, in the form of a disputed customs charge, and cross the narrow landing to the American Vice-Consulate.

Selby was at his desk by the window, fussing feebly among the chaos of his tumbled papers and making a noise of desperation with his lips like a singing kettle.

"Ah, Selby, my friend!" Mr. Barzan went smilingly forward. "You work always too much. And now I come with a little other thing for you. It is too bad—yes?"

"Hullo, Barzan," said Selby. "You're right about the working. Here I keep a girl to keep my papers in some kind of order, and I've been hunting and digging for an hour to find one of 'em. It gets me what she thinks I pay her for! Hoboes and that kind of trash—that's her style."

Mr. Barzan had still his agreeable, mild smile which was as much a part of his daily wear as his trousers. He could not have steered the talk to better purpose.

"Hoboes?" he said. "Trash!"

Selby exploded in weak, sputtering fury, and as always his glasses canted on the high, thin bridge of his nose and waggled to each jerk of words.

"It's that damn hobo—you saw him, Barzan—that pranced in here and threw a fit and a lot of old carpets all over my floor. Well, they took him to the hospital, and this afternoon he sent a message over here."

Mr. Barzan nodded. "Ah, to Miss Pilgrim—yes?—because of her very kind treatment."

Selby caught his glasses as they fell. "You'd have to be a hobo before you'd get any kindness out of her. Hard-luck stories are the only kind she believes. 'I'll have to go, Mr. Selby,' she says. And she goes—and here I'm hunting and pawing around—"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Barzan, "it is inconvenient. So I will come back tomorrow with my matter, when you shall have more time. Then the poor man, he is worse—or better?"

"You don't suppose I been inquiring about him, do you?" asked Selby.

"No," replied Mr. Barzan equably, "I do not suppose that, my friend."

The street in which Miss Pilgrim had her rooms was one of the long gullies of high-fronted architecture running at right angles to the river, and there portly, handsomely over-

coated, with the deliberateness of a balanced and ordered mind in every tread of his measured gait, went Mr. Barzan. He had no plan; his resource and personality would not fail him in an emergency; and it was time he brought them to bear.

One thing he was sure of—he would take the carpet home that night.

At the head of two flights of iron-railed stone stairs he reached the door he sought. Two or three attempts on the bell brought no response, and he could hear no sound of life through the door.

He waited composedly. It did not enter his head that all the occupants might be out; and he was right; for presently, after he had thumped on the door with his gloved fist, there was a slip-slap of feet inside and a sloven of a woman opened to him.

Mr. Barzan gave her his smile. "The English lady is in? I wish to speak to her."

The woman stood aside hastily to let him enter. "Say Gaspodin Barzan is here," he directed blandly.

It was a narrow corridor, flanked with doors. The woman knocked at the nearest of these, opened it, and spoke his name. Immediately from within he heard the glad, gentle voice of the Consul's clerk.

"Surely!" it answered the servant in Russian; then called in English, "Come in, Mr. Barzan, please!"

He removed his hat and entered. An unshaded electric-light bulb filled the room with crude light, stripping its poverty and tawdriness naked to the eye—its bamboo furniture, its imitation parquet, and the cheap distemper of its walls. But of these Mr. Barzan was only faintly aware, for in the middle of the floor, with brown paper and string beside her, Miss Pilgrim knelt amid a kaleidoscope of tumbled rugs; and in her hands, half folded already, was *the* rug.

She was smiling up at him with her mild, serene face, while under her pale hands lay the treasure.

"Now this is nice of you, Mr. Barzan," she was saying. "I suppose Mr. Selby told you I'd had to go out."

Mr. Barzan nodded. He had let his eyes rest on the rug for a space of seconds and then averted them.

"Yes," he said. "He said it was some message about the poor man who was ill, and I think he was angry."

"Angry?" Miss Pilgrim's smile faded. "I'm—I'm sorry about that."

"So," continued Mr. Barzan, "as I have to go by this way, I think I will call to see if I can help. It was some paper Mr. Selby cannot find, I think."

"Some paper?" Miss Pilgrim pondered. "You don't know which it was?"

Mr. Barzan shook his head regretfully. Between them, the rug lay and glowed.

"You see," continued Miss Pilgrim, "it's this way, Mr. Barzan. That poor man in the hospital doesn't seem to be getting any better, and he's evidently fretting about his rugs. They're probably all he's got in the world. So this afternoon they telephoned from the hospital to say he wanted me to send one down in particular—the thinnest of them all. That's this one."

She showed it to him, her fingers feeling its edge. There was wonder in his mind that the mere contact with it did not tell her of its worth.

"I'm afraid it's the one you wanted to buy," she said, "the one you said was worth thirty rubles. Well, of course, it's his, and since he wanted it I had to get it for him. I couldn't do anything else, could I, Mr. Barzan?"

Mr. Barzan agreed. "It is very kind treatment," he approved. "So now you pack it in a parcel and take it to the hospital before you go back to find Mr. Selby's paper—yes? Mr. Selby will be glad."

A pucker of worry appeared between the girl's frank brows, and she fell swiftly to folding and packing the rug.

"If—if only he doesn't leave the office before I get there!" she doubted.

Mr. Barzan picked up the string and prepared to assist with the packing.

"Perhaps he will not be gone," he said consolingly. "He was so angry, I think the paper would be impor-

tant, and he would stay to find it—yes?" Miss Pilgrim did not seem cheered by this supposition. "Well," said Mr. Barzan, "if it should be a help to you and the poor man, I can take this parcel for you and leave it in the gate of the hospital when I go past this evening."

He had a momentary tremor as he made the proposal; but it was not doubt that it would be accepted or fear lest his purpose should show through it. He felt neither of these; it was the thrill of victory that he had to keep out of his tone and his smile.

For it was victory. Miss Pilgrim beamed at him thankfully.

"Oh, Mr. Barzan, you *are* kind!" she cried. "I didn't like to ask you, but you must be a mind reader. If you'd just hand it in for Dr. Semianoff, he'll know all about it and I can get back to Mr. Selby at once. And thank you ever so much, Mr. Barzan!"

"But," protested Mr. Barzan, "it is a little thing—it is nothing. And it is much pleasure to me to do this for you and the poor man. Tonight he will have it, and tomorrow perhaps he will be better."

They went down the stairs together and bade each other a friendly good night in the gateway.

"And I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Barzan," said Miss Pilgrim again, her pale face shining in the dusk.

Mr. Barzan put a fatherly hand on her sleeve. "Hush, you must

not say it," he said. "It is I that am happy."

Half an hour later he found what he sought in a large furniture store on the Pushkinskaya—an imitation Persian rug, manufactured in Frankfurt, and priced at seventeen rubles. With a little bargaining—the salesman was no match for Mr. Barzan at that—he got it for fifteen.

He himself directed the packing of it to see that no store label was included in the parcel; and a quarter of an hour later he delivered it by cab to the *dvoruck* at the hospital gate for Dr. Semianoff.

Then he drove homeward. He could not spare the time to walk while the bundle he held in his arms was still unopened.

His stratagem was perfect. Even if the Armenian were to make an outcry, who would believe him? It would appear—it could easily be made to appear—that he was endeavoring to extort money from Miss Pilgrim on the flimsy pretext that a worthless rug had been substituted for a valuable one, and the police would know how to deal with him. Mr. Barzan put the matter behind him contentedly.

The majestic woman in his home watched him impassively as he unpacked his parcel and spread the rug loosely across a couple of chairs in the salon. In actual words he said only, "This is the carpet, Adina—for your bed. Look at it well!"

She looked obediently, glancing from it to his face, and wondered dully at the light of rapture in his countenance. He pored on it, devouring its rareness of beauty, the sum and the detail of its perfection, with a joy as pure, an appreciation as generous, as if he had not stolen it from under the hands of a sick pauper and a good Samaritan.

Mr. Barzan was a happy man.

That night he stood at the door of his wife's room. "Blessings upon you," he said, and smiled at her in acknowledgment of the blessings she returned.

A brass-and-glass lantern contained the electric light in the chamber; it shone softly on all the apparatus of toilet and slumber, and on the picture that was Mr. Barzan's chief work of art—the marble-white face thrown into high relief by the unbound black hair and the colors, like a tangle of softened and subdued rainbows, that flowed from her bosom to the foot of the bed.

He crossed the floor and kissed her.

"Wonderful," he said to her. "You are an eternal question. And here"—his hand moved on the surface of the rug like a caress—"is the answer to you. Two perfect things—two perfect things!"

"Blessings!" she murmured.

"I have them," he said. "Two of them," and laughed.

He did not see Miss Pilgrim the

following day nor the next. That was easy for him to contrive, for much of his business was done outside his office. It was not that he had any fear of meeting her; but it was more agreeable to his feelings not to be reminded by the sight of her of his acquisition of the carpet.

On the third day he was late in arriving, for his wife had complained at breakfast of headache and sickness, and he had stayed to comfort her and see her back to bed for a twenty-four hours' holiday from life. On his way he had stopped at a florist to send her some flowers.

He was barely seated at his desk when there was a knock on his door and Miss Pilgrim entered.

He smiled his usual pleasant welcome at her.

"Ah, Miss Pilgrim, good morning. I am glad to see you. You will sit down—yes?"

He was rising to give her a chair, not in the least afraid of her, when something about her arrested him—a trouble, a note of sorrow.

"Mr. Barzan," she began.

He knew the value of the deft interruption that breaks the thread of thought. "There is something not right?" he suggested. With a manner of sudden concern he added, "The poor man, he is worse—no?"

Miss Pilgrim showed him a stricken face and eyes brimming with tears. "He's—he's dead!" she quavered.

"See, now!" said Mr. Barzan, shocked. "What a sad thing—and after all your kind treatment. I am sorry, Miss Pilgrim; but it is to remember that the poor man has come here through much hardship—yes? And at the least, you have given him back his rug to comfort him."

"But—" Miss Pilgrim stayed his drift of easy speech with a sort of cry. "That's the cause of all the trouble—and you only did it to help me. You must come with me to the Town Clinic at once. Mr. Selby's gone already. There'll be no danger if you come at once."

"Danger?" repeated Mr. Barzan. "I have not understood." But though in all truth he did not understand, a foreboding of knowledge was like a chill on him. He cleared his throat. "What did he die of?"

Miss Pilgrim's tears had overflowed. She had difficulty in speaking. But her stammered word came as clearly to his ears as though it had been shouted.

"Smallpox!"

He sat down heavily in his chair, and through her tears Miss Pilgrim

saw him shrivel in a gust of utter terror. All his mask of complacency, of kindly power, of reticence of spirit, fell from him; he gulped and his mouth sagged. She moved a step nearer to him.

"But it'll be all right, Mr. Barzan, if you'll just come to the Clinic at once and be vaccinated. It's only because we touched him—and the rugs. There isn't any need to be so frightened."

She could not divine the vision that stood before his strained eyes—the white face of a woman, wary with her ailment and the beautiful thing that blanketed her, beautiful and venomous like a snake. His senses swam. But from his shaking lips two words formed themselves, "My wife!"

"Oh, come along, Mr. Barzan," cried Miss Pilgrim. "Your wife hasn't touched the rugs. She'll be perfectly all right!"

He gave her a look that began abjectly, but strengthened as it continued to something like a strange sneer. For he was a connoisseur—he knew; and he was certain that Fate would never leave a drama unfinished like that.

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE MISSING CHEYNE-STROKE

by ROBERT L. FISH

THE ACTIVITIES OF MY FRIEND Mr. Schlock Homes in the year '56 furnished me with many cases of sufficient interest to record in my journal. Among my notes I find reference to the odd problem of the elderly egg-candler whose partner, Homes was able to prove, had deliberately attempted to induce blindness in the old man, for the purpose of being free to juggle the company books. His method was fiendishly ingenious: he kept introducing crates of hard-boiled eggs for the old man's inspection, and only the sharp perspicacity of my friend foiled the nefarious plot.

My journal also records the name of the American barque *John D. Carr*, whose disappearance was a fortnight's sensation, until Homes was able to accurately predict its exact location in drydock, from a simple mathematical calculation, and the word of the steersman that he had lashed the wheel before going over the side—a case I have already chronicled in *The Adventure of the Locked Rhumb*.

However, of all the cases noted for that year, none in my estimation demonstrates so clearly the accuracy of his prognostication, or the expansiveness of his imagination, as the case which became famous as *The Adventure of the Missing Cheyne-Stroke*.

It was a beautiful afternoon in June, and I was lounging at the open windows of our quarters at 221B Bagel Street, enjoying the rare sunshine, and resting my leg which still ached at times from an old Jezbel wound suffered in the battle of Piccidilli. Schlock Homes, an ardent chemist, had busied himself with his new Gilbert set, and an air of contentment combined with the odors of his experiment to waft through the room.

Our pleasant idyll was suddenly broken, however, by the urgent sound of footsteps in the hall, and a moment later a knock at the door announced a visitor. He was a huge young man, carelessly dressed, and he filled the doorway, breathing heavily from his climb.

"Mr. Schlock Homes?" he enquired, glancing anxiously at my friend. "A mutual friend was kind enough to give me your address, and I hurried here as quickly as possible."

Homes waved him to a chair, and the young man flung himself into it. "Mr. Homes, there is no one else in England who can help us in this crucial hour—Charlie Charles is missing, and there is no stroke like him on the river! Miss Tompkins keeps crabbing; Cox couldn't keep time with a metronome; and Miss Judd is a feathering idiot! Unless you are able to find Charles before to-morrow morning, I fear we are lost."

Homes listened to this passionate outburst in amused silence, and when the young man had finished, he remarked with a smile, "I am afraid that I am the one who is lost, sir. Who is Charlie Charles?"

The young man contemplated us in amazement. "Certainly you must have heard of Charles!" he exclaimed. "He took both his Black and Blue in sculling, and is the amateur oars champion!"

"Possibly it would be well if you began at the beginning and told us all," said Homes, leaning back comfortably. "I would deduce that you are referring to some species of sport, and I fear that neither Dr. Watney nor I is an expert in that field. These names and terms which you are using are quite unfamiliar to me."

"Well, Mr. Homes," said the young man, leaning forward earnestly. "It seems hard to believe that you have not heard of the great Charlie Charles, but I shall attempt to clarify my remarks. My name is Legion, John Legion, and I am the rowing coach at Cheyne College in Lincs., at the little village of Clapham. Tomorrow morning the International Mixed-Foursome College Rowing Championship is being held here in London, and sculling squads from all over the world have gathered for this competition. Each team is composed of two men and two women and we, as well as the other visiting teams, have been assigned dormitory space as the guests of Putney University. Each athlete has his or her private room to ensure the necessary privacy and rest before to-morrow's important event."

"Charlie Charles is our left-stroke, and until this morning I would have wagered a week's wages on Cheyne to win to-morrow. This noon, however, I went to his room to speak with him and found it deserted. A further investigation indicated that he was not on campus and had not been seen. I have questioned all of his team-mates, and have searched in all possible places, but I have not uncovered a trace of his presence. If you are unable to locate Charles before the race to-morrow, I fear we shall lose!"

Homes's eyes glittered with interest. "You have but the one sculling team?"

"Yes, just the one."

"But more than one stroke?"

"No—just the one."

"And this is the one who is missing?"

"Yes, this one."

"Singular," said Homes thoughtfully. "Quite singular! However, I fear that we can solve little here. Let us repair to the campus of Putney University and see what can be learned from a study of the actual scene. If, as you say, the race is to be held to-morrow, we shall have need for prompt action."

A few moments sufficed for Homes to change from his dressing-gown to more suitable habiliments, and minutes later we were rattling along the bank of the Thames in Mr. Legion's trap, while the young coach gave us more details on the sport of shell-racing and the eminent reputation of the missing stroke, Charles Charles. Homes sat silent, his eyes closed, but I knew he was absorbing every word of the conversation, and storing it in his colossal memory for future reference.

We turned from the Embankment, coming in on Kew, and shortly thereafter came upon the Putney campus. The dormitories assigned to the rowing teams were huge blocks of buildings, facing upon a large quadrangle of well-kept greenery. The various en-

trances to each building had been hung with slogans and banners, each announcing support of a different team.

Across the ornately carved doorway at which our trap halted, a huge pennant waved, reading: *Clapham! Here Comes Charliel* Mr. Legion eyed this sadly, but without comment led us through the shadowed entrance to the room which had been assigned to the famous stroke.

A scene of utter chaos confronted us. Bedclothes were strewn about the room; a battered portable typewriter leaned drunkenly against a chair-leg; books and papers were scattered over the desk and chairs; neckties hung from the chandelier. At sight of this disorder, Homes's eye brightened, and I knew from his manner that his interest in this strange case had been actively aroused.

"Charles seems to have put up a brave struggle," he said, surveying the destruction piercingly. "With your permission I shall properly examine the room, for it is more than possible that the answer to the disappearance lies here."

For the next thirty minutes Homes searched the room with that meticulous attention to detail which had often rewarded him with success in the past. With fierce concentration he studied the closet, looked beneath the bed, and even explored back of the doors. One drawer of the dresser exhibited

a large collection of time-pieces, including wrist-watches and pocket-watches; a second drawer was filled with dirty laundry; while a third seemed to be the repository for old letters and clippings.

Suddenly Homes stiffened to attention and drew from beneath these papers a heart-shaped piece of tinsel which I immediately recognized as an old Valentine. Scanning it carefully, he finally folded it and placed it in his waistcoat pocket, after which he returned to the search with even greater energy. A sigh of satisfaction indicated to me that he had discovered something of further interest, and he arose from his perusal of the wastebasket clutching a crumpled sheet of typing paper. Placing it in his pocket with the Valentine, he gave the room a final glance, and then led the way to the open quadrangle.

"One final question and I believe I shall have all I can hope to garner here," he said, fixing Mr. Legion with a firm glance. "Can you tell me what course of study Mr. Charles was following at Cheyne?"

"He was a typing major, Mr. Homes," replied the young coach, obviously puzzled by the seemingly irrelevant question. "But I fail to see what possible connection that could have with his disappearance."

"It may be of the greatest importance," replied Homes seriously. "Or, of course, it may not. There

being little more to be learned here, with your permission we shall return to our quarters and study our findings in greater detail. Yes, yes, Mr. Legion, I am fully aware of the urgency of the matter, and I suggest that you drop by at eight this evening, when I hope to have some news for you."

On the drive back, Homes sat forward, chuckling and rubbing his hands, a sure sign that he saw some light in this most impenetrable case. "A brilliant boy, Charlie Charles!" said he. "For despite the obvious confusion of his last minutes in that room he still managed to leave us with sufficient clues to point a clear trail to his captors. It is our duty to properly interpret the signs he has left, and we must not fail him in this!"

We descended at Bagel Street and Homes fixed himself a long drink immediately, and sank into his favorite chair, spreading the crumpled paper and the folded Valentine before him.

"An hour of solitude, if you please, Watney," he remarked, his warm smile robbing the words of any rejection. "I am sure that the complete answer to this puzzle is before me—if only I can grasp it!"

I retired to the window-seat once again, although I was bursting with questions regarding the two papers on the table. But knowing Homes and his love of mystery, I bided my silence, and watched the long shadows of evening settle

over the huge city. I must have dozed a bit, for suddenly the firm grip of my friend's hand on my shoulder brought me from my reverie with a start.

"Watney!" he cried in great excitement. "I have it! You must send a telegram to Legion at once. When he comes to-night I wish him to bring the room-assignment plan for all of the teams, as well as the names of the occupants. This is most important!"

"But, Homes!" I said in vexation. "I fail to understand how you were able to deduce anything from the little you found in that room!"

"Later, Watney," said he, smiling at my puzzlement. "All shall be clear before the night is finished. We have a busy evening in store for us, I fear, so if you do not mind I shall relax a bit before our visitor arrives with a few moments of Venuti. My violin, if you please, Watney!"

At eight o'clock sharp Mr. Legion appeared, and while he was as consumed with curiosity as myself, he said nothing, but placed the assignment list on the table and drew up a chair between Homes and myself.

Homes immediately fell to studying the list with great attention, whistling a Shostakovich prelude softly to himself as he did so. He seemed to be searching for a particular item, and after at least a minute of full concentration the

whistle ceased and a bright smile lit his countenance. I knew at once that he had found the information he had been seeking.

"The case is solved!" he announced complacently, leaning back and enjoying the effect this pronouncement made upon us. "With any luck Charles will be back in his room before midnight! Allow me to begin at the beginning and show you the steps in the solution.

"It was evident as soon as we saw Charles' room that he had been removed against his will. My only hope was that he had been able to leave behind a clue to the identity of his assailants before being kidnapped. He is an extremely clever boy, that Charles, and should go far in life; for despite the pressure of those last few moments he managed to leave not one, but two distinct signs pointing to his captors—probably feeling that if we missed one, we would not miss both. The first clue was in this paper which he crumpled and flung into the wastebasket where it avoided all eyes but mine."

Homes handed us the sheet which he had been guarding so carefully. It was a standard sheet of typing paper, and had repeated upon it one sentence, typed at least thirty times. The sentence read: *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.* When we had a chance to study it sufficiently, Homes re-

turned it to the table, and continued.

"Had Charles been a student of political science, I might well have accepted this by as being a part of his studies; but since we know he was majoring in another subject, its significance increases sharply. I realize that there is a ball to-night for the visiting teams, but he could not have been referring to this party, since it was obviously written much earlier. It can therefore only be a message."

"But, Homes," I interrupted, "what can it intend to convey?"

"Think, Watney! In this International Competition to-morrow, there must be many teams from behind the Iron Curtain. Charles, by referring to the 'party,' is telling us who his captors are! I admit I am surprised that they adopted a method so lacking in subtlety, but time, I imagine, was running out. These Governments, which we will not mention by name, will do anything to win a sporting event!"

"Of course!" cried Mr. Legion, striking his fist upon his knee. "Now I understand it! It was not the first attempt, Mr. Homes! Just yesterday one of the members of an Iron Curtain team falsely accused Charles of having stolen his watch. The facts were quite innocent; Charlie has taken up amateur magic as a hobby, and as yet is not too adept at it. He can make things disappear, but he still has trouble at times in bringing them back.

His first efforts being unsuccessful led these people to call for the police, but when, after a further try, he was able to produce the watch, they were forced to drop their ridiculous charge. Now I can see that it was only a means of preventing him from competing in the race!"

Homes nodded. "Had they known, as I do, that Charles is the possessor of some fifty watches, they would have realized the idiocy of such a charge, for Charles, of all people, has no need for another time-piece. However, to return to our problem, we now are familiar with the group who arranged the kidnapping. It only remains to show you the exact person involved, and the place where Charles is being held prisoner."

Taking the folded Valentine from the table, he opened it to the scrawled message within and passed it to us to read. Written in a bold hand, it said:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Sugar is sweet,
And so are you.

"The fact of finding a Valentine in June, when everyone knows that the Saint's day is always commemorated in February, made it plain to me that it was planted there—obviously for the purpose of leaving a message. Note the words well, for they are Charles' means of directing us to the place of his incarceration. In studying the room-

assignments for the various teams, I paid small attention to the teams of the Iron Curtain countries, for they are too intelligent to hide him in their own quarters. No; for this I was certain that they would employ the services of sympathizers, and I therefore searched among teams coming from countries who have long exhibited jealousy of things British. And then I found, as I had truly expected to find, that the Vassar team from the American colonies had the following people."

His thin, strong finger pointed to the printed list before us, and we read:

Vassar Team:

John (Muscles) O'Grady, Room 196

Maybelle (Honey) Ross, Room 211

Thomas (Bull) Jones, Room 243

Valerie (Sugar) Edwards, Room 216

Both Legion and myself stared at Homes in complete puzzlement, for we could see no connection between this list and the Valentine message. Homes saw our expression, and could not repress a laugh.

"Reread the Valentine message phonetically," said he with a deep smile, "taking alternate lines and see what you have. *Ross is a red, violets are blue, Sugar's suite, and so are you. Yes, my friends, that is the answer. Mr. Charles is being held against his will in Room 216,*

in the dormitory assigned to Vassar. The feminine members of this team were the sympathizers who fell in with the foul plan. I should have suspected a woman immediately, for Charles was too smart to fall victim to a man. However, the native chivalry of the British sportsman would have demanded that he allow a girl entrance to his quarters without suspicion! We must rescue him to-night if he is to race to-morrow. Heaven knows what these fiends might have done to him in his incarceration!"

"But, Homes," I cried, "is this not a matter for the police?"

Homes shook his head. "We have a duty to England not to involve her in international incidents, Watney," he replied seriously. "No; during the dance to-night they may well feel safe enough to leave him unguarded, for they have no idea that Schlock Homes is on their trail. We must spirit him away before they know he is gone, and guard him until the race!"

"But, Mr. Homes," interrupted Legion, his strong, young face alit at the prospect of action. "How will we gain entrance? The door is sure to be locked, and we cannot break in without exciting suspicion."

"I happen to be familiar with all types of latching devices," replied Homes confidently. "My reputation in this field has reached a point, I believe, where one seldom thinks of Bagel Street without

thinking of locks. It will be small trouble to adapt a standard pick-lock to our purpose. Watney, my welding equipment!"

"You wish the blanché solder?"

"No, no! The silver braze! There—that should do the trick! Now, gentlemen, the plan shall be as follows: you, Mr. Legion, shall stay below in the entry—to see that we are not followed. Watney, you and I shall make our way to Room 216 and see if we can manage to spirit Charles away without raising an alarm. Should we have need of your strength, Mr. Legion, be sure we will call out! And now, gentlemen, if you are ready, I suggest we waste no time."

Within an hour we were once again on the Putney campus, and Legion melted into the shadows as Homes and I slipped silently into the darkened building. Across the quadrangle, music and laughter came from the hall where the crew members were enjoying their party, but all was desolate in our sector.

Legion had given us the layout of the building, and we were able to make our way to Room 216 without the necessity of showing a light. As I waited breathlessly, Homes crept to the door and pressed his ear to the panel. When no sound came to him, he silently turned the handle, and the door swung open.

"The fools did not even lock it!" he whispered. "Come, Watney!"

A crumpled figure lurched half erect from a chair in one corner, and then collapsed once more, muttering incoherently. "You were certainly gone long enough, baby-doll," babbled this apparition. "Did you bring the other bottle?"

"Delirium, poor devil!" exclaimed Homes in a low voice. "Quickly, Watney, your medical skill is urgently required!"

I instantly took charge of the boy, checking for pulse and respiration, but as I bent over him, the true cause of his suffering became apparent. "We must get him back to his room!" I cried. "Have Mr. Legion arrange for black coffee at once—these devils have plied him with alcohol and he is in sad shape!"

It was some thirty minutes later when I had the boy sitting up amid the dishevelment of his own room. He was pale and silent, but the worst effects of his drugging had already passed.

"Do not attempt to speak, Mr. Charles," said Homes in a warm voice. "You have been the victim of an attempt at kidnapping, but thanks to your cleverness in leaving those messages, and Mr. Legion's promptness in calling me into the case, we were able to locate you and rescue you in time. I wish to congratulate you on keeping your head as you have done, and tell you that England is proud of you! Go out to-morrow and win that race, for that will be the big-

gest blow you can strike against your captors and their alien philosophy!"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Homes," replied the lad, attempting to speak calmly. "And now, if you will forgive me, I must get my rest."

He embraced us both with a warmth that was surprising from one in his weakened condition, and turned immediately to his bed. Homes and I walked quickly out into the night, while Legion prepared to guard his star until the actual moment of the race.

The following day, exhausted by the events of the previous evening, both Homes and myself slept late, and it was therefore well into the afternoon when I came into the dining-room.

Homes appeared a moment later, yawning deeply, but by that time I had already folded the journal to the sporting section and was reading the racing results. Homes merely lifted an eyebrow in interrogation, and I smiled back at him.

"Yes, Cheyne College, representing England, did indeed win the championship, and the teams have already left for their respective homelands," I said, folding the paper and handing it to him. "In my estimation, the thanks should go as much to you as to Charles!"

Homes shrugged modestly. "Where our country is involved," said he, "there is no question, ever,

of thanks. I am happy that we were able to settle the problem so peacefully, and in my opinion the greatest credit should go to that brilliant lad, who is a credit to England!

"But that is finished now, Watney, and although we have need for new horizons, I feel we have earned ourselves a day's rest—so no crime news, if you please. Rather, I suggest we pass the time at the afternoon concert at Robert Hall. There is a gas-pipe organ solo to-day which I should hate to miss. What time do you have, Watney?"

I searched my pockets without success for several moments. "I am afraid I must have dropped my time-piece during last night's events," I answered. "Do you not have the correct hour?"

"My watch is also missing," replied Homes. "In the excitement of last evening I fear I must have lost it without noting. Surely one of the Vassar team must have encountered our watches this morning, yet you tell me that they have disbanded and left without attempting to make contact with us! We shall notify the authorities at once!"

"But, Homes," I protested, "is there not a possibility of an international incident over this?"

"Kidnapping is one thing," he replied coldly, his voice tinged with anger, "but failure to return lost property is quite another! A telegram to my brother Criscroft at the Home Office, if you please, Watney!"

AUTHOR: **JOHN F. SUTER**

TITLE: ***It Wouldn't Button Up***

TYPE: Detective Story à la **Black Mask**

DETECTIVE: Uncle Bert

LOCALE: United States

TIME: Nearly 50 years ago

COMMENTS: *Old Uncle Bert had once been Chief of Police in a very small town. There was one case in which he was dead-sure he knew who the murderer was—but couldn't prove it . . .*

WHILE WE WERE WAITING FOR the stragglers to show up, so that we could start our weekly poker game, we got to talking about crime. As usual. This time it was about cases in which the identity of the criminal seemed to be known, but nothing was ever done about it.

"You ever have any of those in Millersburg?" Joe Evans asked my Uncle Bert.

"Oh, sure," said Uncle Bert, polishing his glasses. "One."

The way Joe Evans and Ralph Stewart looked at Uncle Bert, you could tell they were wondering why Millersburg hadn't had more than one unfinished case. Or maybe they were wondering why any

crimes at all had ever been solved in Millersburg while Uncle Bert had been Chief of Police.

I think the reason they like to have Uncle Bert sit in our Wednesday night poker game is that they think it will make them feel superior. Uncle Bert is 83 now, and he was Chief of Police for a long, long time. But Millersburg had had a population of about 1500 for a long, long time, too. It has only begun to grow in the last ten years. So naturally you'd expect the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney (Joe Evans) and the head of the State Police Crime Lab. (Ralph Stewart) to know the score a little better than old Uncle Bert.

As I say, I think that's the reason

they like to have him sit in—because, in the poker game itself, Uncle Bert usually comes out ahead. By a tidy bit.

"This Collins case is going to be one of those," Joe said to Ralph. "We tried to get the older brother to take a lie detector test today, but his lawyer wouldn't let him. We can't insist, but it might have opened him up for us. We don't have enough solid evidence to go to trial. So what can we do? The papers will carry the story of his refusal, and people will jump to conclusions—and that's where it will end."

Ralph nodded his close-cropped head of curly red hair. "And before anybody had a lie detector around here, there was the knifing of Edna Burke. The knife was left in her, and she hardly bled a drop. Yet there were bloodstains on her rug, and Harry Wright had a long gouge on his left wrist which he could have got in a tussle with her. The trouble was, her blood-type and his were the same. And there was no other evidence worth a bean."

Joe's long, lean jaw swung around in Uncle Bert's direction and he almost licked his thin lips.

"Why, then," said Uncle Bert, "if you fellows can't pin it on 'em with all these newfangled tricks, you're no better off than we used to be."

"In the horse-and-buggy days?" Ralph grinned.

Uncle Bert looks like one of

those old British Sergeant-Majors, with that big, heavy mustache of his. Now his blue eyes clouded for a moment, then he slowly put on his glasses and stared at Ralph.

"Horse-and-buggy days? Well, yes, and no. Kind of in-between, this case was. Nigh onto fifty years ago, as I recall.

"We had this drummer who came to town—they hadn't come around yet to calling 'em salesmen—and he called pretty regular. Men's accessories—ties, socks, garters, stiff collars, and the like. But haberdashery wasn't the only interest he had in Millersburg, if you believed the gossip.

"I've always listened to gossip," Uncle Bert went on reflectively, as he reached for a bottle of the cold beer I'd set out a few minutes before, "even though I don't always believe it. Gossip had it that this drummer's main prospect in Millersburg was Nellie Fitch, and what he was trying to sell was Ben Groff—himself.

"I wasn't any too surprised when the gossip had it that Groff had done a good job of selling in that line, too. It shouldn't have been too hard to convince Nellie to discard the Jake Fitch line for a better one, even as well off as Jake was. Me, I could hardly stand to be in the same room with Jake, let alone be close to him."

"Offended your sensibilities, did he?" chuckled Ralph.

"If you want to be pussy-footy

about it, yes," Uncle Bert said stolidly. "Jake was big and strong and had quite a bit of money, the way I said, but he'd come to be sort of calloused towards everything, including Nellie, who was a mighty handsome woman, with a fine head of chestnut hair and a pair of snapping hazel eyes. Lots of times, you could see it in those eyes that she wanted more attention out of Jake, but *he* couldn't seem to see it. Then Ben Groff came down the pike.

"I don't know how long this affair of Nellie's and Ben's went on, when one day Groff up and disappeared. How it first was noticed was when the Miller Hotel found out he hadn't been in his room for a couple of days, and all his stuff was still there. They weren't worried about him skipping out on his bill, because he was always a good spender and, anyway, he'd left enough stuff to cover it. He left too much, that was it. So they told me about it.

"Soon's the mention was made, I realized that Groff *hadn't* been around. He was a little less than average in size, but he was a real sharp dresser, and he struck you as a fine-looking, clean-cut young fellow. Surprised you, did I? You thought because he was a drummer that he'd be a mite too slick and maybe a little slimy. Not so. But when he was gone, it was *noticed*.

"Well, I asked around. He hadn't hired anybody to drive him in a car anywhere out in the county on

the good roads. And he hadn't hired a horse and buggy to go where the roads were dirt—and we had a lot of 'em, then. Nobody'd seen him leave on the train, either.

"Then gossip began to recall some impressions, and the story began to get around that Jake had taken a buggy whip to Nellie. I never did know, for sure—"

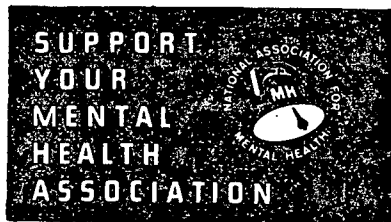
"You didn't check it out?" Joe said, grinning slyly.

"No," said Uncle Bert. "Nellie never did say anything, so what could *I* do? Besides, I didn't have any policewomen, when you get down to fine points."

"You must have finally concluded that Jake did away with this guy. Did you ever question him?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, yes. I went over to his place of business. I'll never forget it. He was standing out in front when I came up. 'You want something, Bert?' he said, looking like he'd been expecting me. 'Why, Jake,' I said, 'I'm looking around town for that drummer, Ben Groff. I want *him*.' I was tryin' to make out like I wanted Groff for something *he'd* done, you see. 'Maybe you've seen him?' I said.

"Just then a fellow came up with some horses and said to Jake, 'What d'you want done with these old nags?' Jake didn't answer me, like he was about to. He jerked his head and said, 'Around back, same as always. You know where.' When the fellow left, Jake looked at me





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sort of hard-nosed and growled, 'You were sayin'?'

"Ben Groff," I answered. "You seen him?" He just spit in the dirt. 'Hell, no. Should I have?' he said, looking me right in the eye. 'I hoped you might have,' I said. He laughed like he didn't mean it and said, 'I guess he's spreading himself around. I hear he likes to do that.'

"That's all I got out of him. As time went on, a lot of people came trying to find Ben Groff—his older brother, some woman from upstate, and others. We never did get a line on him, and we let 'em think he'd skipped out. I couldn't tell 'em that the case just wouldn't button up."

"But did you really dig into it to see if Jake Fitch had killed him?" Ralph demanded.

"Dig? No. I wouldn't have known where to dig," said Uncle Bert innocently. "I felt sure Jake had done it, but I could never prove it."

He paused and murmured ambiguously, "That winter, when I fixed up some furniture for the wife, I thought about it a lot."

"I still can't see why you just gave up," Joe said, a little vexed.

"When the guy next to you stands pat, you don't draw to an inside straight." Uncle Bert took a long pull at the beer. "Anyway, Jake Fitch was kicked in the head by a horse not long after that, and that removed my problem," he said, wiping his mustache. "Jake, you see, ran a small glue factory."

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OPERATION FIVE MILLIONS

by JAMES T. FITZPATRICK

THE THING THAT DISTINGUISHED pudgy, melancholy Wilhelm from everyone else in Tahiti was his empty hands as he came up the stairs of the Meurice. It was mail-plane day, and Jim the Australian and I—and everyone we could see—had at least a post card or a three-weeks' old newspaper to read.

"Sit down, Wilhelm, and have a beer before you start back to Paea and your chickens," Jim said to the sad-faced little man. "Come into town to get your post?"

"I haven't had a letter in fifteen years. I came in to see the doctor. That attack I had last week may be my last—or next to the last," he said in good English.

Jim had a callous sort of humor that I didn't find particularly amus-

ing. "Then before you shuffle off this mortal coil I want to ask you something that has always puzzled me. See that little palm-covered islet this side of the reef? That was a prison camp during the war. Why weren't you interned on it as an enemy alien?"

Wilhelm had no reluctance to talk. "In the summer of 1939 I thought something might happen, so I went to South America. I wasn't bothered there. When the war was over I came back to Tahiti." He took off his high-crowned straw hat, revealing thin strands of hair that stretched over his bald dome like strings on a snare drum.

"Like me," Jim said. "Too young for the first war, too old for the second, and too smart for the third."

"But I was in the First World War." The German pushed the short sleeve on his arm up to the shoulder and we saw a long, red scar. "That's what one of the Yanks did to me at Château-Thierry," he added.

"Wilhelm, you were just a skinny, rosy-cheeked lad with a thick mop of black wool when I first saw you here in 1920."

"And my life was already over," he replied glumly. "My life—and the five million dollars I lost."

Jim's glass paused in mid-air. "Now that's a fair dinkum bit of money."

The crow's-feet around Wilhelm's eyes deepened. He started talking as if he were in a confessional or on a psychoanalyst's couch . . .

When I got out of the hospital (Wilhelm began), I was assigned to the army pay corps in Berlin because the doctors said I was no good for fighting. One day two officers came into our bureau and talked with the director for a few minutes. He snapped his fingers and pointed to me. "Get your cap and go with them."

I followed them out to a limousine and they told me to get in with the chauffeur. As we drove along I said to him, "I haven't done anything. I may not be a Von Richthofen, but I'm not a coward and I haven't stolen a pfennig."

No response. I stole a look at the two officers in the back seat. They

reminded me of the Sphinx with a hard-boiled expression on its face. I continued examining my conscience until we arrived at the Anhalt Station. The officers got out and marched me down the tracks to a startling sight.

There were enough workmen scrambling in and out of a wagon-lit, or sleeping car, to build an entire train. Watching them was a little knot of officers headed by a General. In their midst was a tall, thin man in a high silk hat, frock coat, and striped trousers. My companions and I whipped up salutes for the General, but I knew instinctively that the important cogwheel in this machinery was the silk-hatted dandy.

There was also a swarthy man in the uniform of a Turkish General with the party. Silk Hat clamped a monocle in his eye and said something to me in precise Turkish, but with such a heavy East Prussian accent that I couldn't understand him. I stood there trembling, not daring to ask him to repeat himself. To me a lance corporal was the Archangel Michael, and any rank higher was almost Divine Providence. The swarthy Turkish officer lifted an eyebrow at Silk Hat as if requesting permission to intervene.

Then he turned to me and rattled off in Turkish dialect, "The count asked you if you were able to speak fluent Turkish."

"Yes," I said. "My mother was

Turkish and my father was a civil engineer on the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway—and the totals of my payroll accounts are always correct," I added, to forestall any ideas they might have about putting me before a firing squad.

The nearest thing I ever saw to a smile appeared on Silk Hat's lips, and everybody seemed to give a sigh of relief. I say "seemed" because nobody did anything of the kind. It was just that the tension eased a trifle.

When the workmen finished their hammering, a sweating and harassed railway official invited an inspection. I don't know if you're familiar with the European wagon-lit, but the aisle runs down the side of the car, not the center. All passengers are in compartments, a person with a first-class ticket having a compartment to himself. Between two compartments is a lavatory. Some of the interior of this car had been redone to make a lounge with sofas, chairs, tables, and lamps. The decorations were done in the style of Aubrey Beardsley, because no one seemed to know that the Victorian Age was over. But we were going to learn that very soon.

I was standing in a corner, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, when I looked out the window and saw something that startled me again. A few feet away was one of the four or five ranking officers in the entire military machine. He

climbed out of the sidecar of a motorcycle driven by a sergeant covered with medals. He entered the car and his expression changed from normal Junker arrogance to soul-shattering belligerence.

Standing at one end of the lounge, he let his monocled eye rove up and down the length of it. The eye finally came to rest on the General standing next to Silk Hat, and the monocle fell into his cupped palm as he bellowed, "*Dummkopf!*"

And the Great Man, a Field Marshal, opened up on the General with a dressing-down that would have taken the starch out of the stiffest ramrod who ever humiliated a subordinate. The abuse began filtering down through the various echelons until, normally, the sergeant would have finished by castigating me. Since I had no one to pass it on to, I'd have to wait until the war was over and join a revolutionary political party.

But time was apparently precious; the Field Marshal spat out a word and we dutifully trooped outside, with me bringing up the rear. Silk Hat, incidentally, assumed through all this the bland neutrality that an older child does when little brother is getting a wallop from papa.

When the car was ready, the workmen were sent packing to their suppers of cabbage soup. The General looked at me and said to the Field Marshal, "Arm him."

The Field Marshal looked at the sergeant. "Arm him!"

The sergeant whisked off his Luger and handed it to me, complete with holster, belt, and cartridges. I buckled it on. The sergeant took off on his motorcycle with a volley of putt-putts, and this meant the Field Marshal would have to walk a hundred yards to the station unless troops were pulled out of the front line trenches to carry him there. When the party had dwindled to Silk Hat, the Field Marshal, the General, and me, a switch engine backed a strange kind of freight car up to the scene and the General handed me a key.

"Unlock it," he snapped.

I did, wondering if it might be a new kind of munitions car, but as usual I was wrong. Part of the cargo, at least, was human.

An officer jumped out, followed by an honor guard with packs, heavily armed. They went into one end of the wagon-lit, and more soldiers, from my own bureau, came out of the car carrying small but very heavy boxes. These they deposited at the opposite end of the wagon-lit, and returned to the freight car, whereupon the switch engine pulled it away.

"Follow us!" the General said to me, and I clambered behind my lords and masters into the wagon-lit. The first thing I noticed was that two compartments and the lounge at our end were sealed off

from the rest of the car by a steel partition.

We bumped. That would be a locomotive coupling up. We bumped again. That would be another car we were picking up, perhaps a mess car to feed the troops on the other side of the partition. Two waiters came aboard with hampers of food and drink, and a round of *apéritifs* was enjoyed by all—all but me. Then the officers got up to leave and bowed to the Silk Hat. I started to follow them out.

"You stay," the General said, and at last I gathered that Silk Hat and I and the soldiers were the ones selected for the *hegira*. Silk Hat locked the door after the officers, tried the end door of the car, then crossed the lounge and threw his slight weight against the steel partition two or three times. Satisfied with our barricade, he went into the lavatory between the two compartments and came out drying his hands and humming something from *The Twilight of the Gods*.

He opened a hamper, set out some food on a collapsible table, and looked at it without enthusiasm. He also opened a leather case, which turned out to be a portable pharmacy. He took out four or five kinds of pills and medicines and said to me, "Open a bottle of mineral water."

That night I lay awake in the bunk of my compartment wondering what it was all about. The

workmen that afternoon had reminded me of the busy little dwarfs guarding the Rhine gold. Beyond the string of cars which had been drawn up to screen the wagon-lit and us, locomotives sent up columns of smoke and puffs of steam and made staccato shrieks that didn't sound like man, machine, or animal. Germany's situation was getting desperate, yet some of her top leaders were fiddling around with a railway car in a setting more appropriate to tramps than to great men.

I awoke the next morning and peeked out my window from under the shade. We were approaching Prague. After I washed and dressed, I sat on my bunk with the door to the lavatory open. Silk Hat, wearing an embroidered nightgown, entered the lavatory from his compartment. Always nervous about protocol, I jumped up to close the door. He told me to come to his compartment in fifteen minutes. I did, and found him dressed in a tweed traveling suit. The train stopped and there was a thumping on the door to the vestibule.

Silk Hat gave me the key to unlock it. A new General, and his aide, stepped in; there were the usual bowing and heel-clicking. The General looked at my waist and frowned. He said something to Silk Hat, and that's the last time I was caught without the Luger. I even took it to bed with me.

And so it went: Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Sofia. Always we were met by a high-ranking officer who stayed a few minutes and left. The same two waiters brought in casseroles of food with charcoal braziers to keep them warm. Good bread, rich butter, pots of steaming coffee, delicacies and tropical fruits I thought had ceased to exist. A train steward always followed to clean the compartments, and the one at Vienna threw me a bundle which contained new hose and underclothing—just my size. Our safari had been well planned.

Silk Hat never went to the lounge. At first I thought it was some kind of haughty disdain that prevented him from using what had been prepared for him at such trouble and expense. But gradually I decided that he was a very sick man who used all his energy to dress each morning, and could only lie on the seat all day. The shade in his compartment was usually up between stops; but I had been over the route a dozen times, so I didn't even have the pleasure of seeing unfamiliar scenery. He never asked me my name, who my father was, where I was from, or what my duties were. Except to order me to prepare his numerous medicines, he didn't say a dozen words a day to me.

The monotony was broken when we crossed the Bulgarian-Turkish frontier and stopped at Adrianople. The German officer who came

aboard that day rushed into Silk Hat's compartment barking, "Thank God! Thank God!" as though he were uttering a command instead of a prayer. I was at my self-appointed post in the corridor and, as usual, the door was slammed in my face. But I was getting a little smarter now. I went through my compartment into the lavatory and pressed my ear against the door.

"But it's true, Excellency. This Frenchman, Franchet d'Esperey, took over the enemy command in Salonica last June and he has been giving the Bulgarians trouble ever since. They must have capitulated while you were crossing the frontier. Thank God you got through. Oh, the stupidity of it! Why didn't they tell us their situation was so desperate?"

"Why didn't our liaison officers?"

"You mean even if the High Command knew, it couldn't have done anything? Tell me Excellency is our situation hopeless?"

Silk Hat wouldn't have been chosen for our mission, whatever it was, if he gave straightforward answers to questions like that, so I didn't bother to listen any more. I returned to my post just before the waiters arrived with their delicacies, and the steward with his broom and mop.

We got into Istanbul—or Constantinople as it was then called—about noon. I peeked under the shade in my compartment to see

what our newest reception committee would be like. A Turkish Captain came into my field of vision. He didn't stop at our end of the car, but kept going and apparently got some action.

I stepped quickly to the end of the lounge and tried a little eavesdropping in that sector. Pressing my ear against the partition separating us from the honor guard, I heard the command to shoulder packs and get moving. I went back to my compartment window and saw the squad march away, the Turkish officer bringing up the rear.

We were in motion again. I lowered a window and stuck out my head. After all, nobody had forbidden it. We had dropped the mess car. The engine was now pulling only one car—ours. It took us to a remote part of the yards, where it was uncoupled. With a sinking feeling I watched it steam away.

We were alone now—Silk Hat and I. It was unearthly quiet. He had never been forced to call me—I was always just where I was wanted. Well, let him call me for a change. My self-granted freedom was enjoyable and, anyway, I'd be in the corridor when the latest General came along.

But no General came. I waited. One o'clock. Two. Then three. I went to the lavatory a couple of times and poured myself a glass of water from the decanter there.

My new freedom began to chafe. I was anxious to get into the irksome but secure embrace of discipline once more. I knocked on Silk Hat's door. No answer. I knocked again, good and loud. Still no answer. I opened the door. He was sitting wedged in his corner by the window staring at the opposite wall. He was dead as a Pharaoh's mummy.

After a while I went to work. The most valuable stuff would be in the smallest containers. I soon found a dispatch case, but didn't touch the envelopes with their important-looking seals. However, I took all the paper money of various countries and pouch of gold coins. About a thousand dollars—Silk Hat's pin money. I opened a package which I thought might be a going-away present. It contained keys. That's what interested me. Now I'd find out what was in those boxes.

Where were they? Not in the upper berth, not behind the luggage. I moved the dead man off his roost and pulled out the seat which could be made into a bed. There was a door into the space behind the lavatory. I found the key that unlocked it and noticed that it had recently been lined with steel.

There were the boxes. They were of wood, but so heavily reinforced with iron or bronze that they seemed to be made of metal. I opened an iron one. Gold ingots! I opened a bronze one. Gold coins,

neatly and tightly packed. I started to take all the coins I could carry, but then resisted the urge. This was a big time operation and petty pilfering was foolish. I didn't consider the money I had taken from the dispatch case—that was mere spending money.

I restored everything as it had been, including the dead man—I was getting quite used to him by this time. Going through his pockets I found his card case to be the only thing of interest. He was a Count—a blend of Prussian estate owner and Ruhr industrialist. Nobility and high bourgeoisie—an unbeatable combination.

Was Constantinople our last stop? If so, our reception committee should have been bigger and better than the others. Some of my mother's relatives lived here and I was already determined to visit them if we should stay for a while.

What had gone wrong? Except for the *dummkopf* ballet in the beginning the expedition had come off thus far with clockwork precision. I was proud of our Teutonic organizing ability. By now the news of Bulgaria's surrender—or garbled versions of it—was seeping down from the chancelleries of the world to the bewildered man in the street and his counterpart in the trenches. Had the other nations of the Entente also capitulated? I wondered if this was somebody's getaway money. The imperial family's, perhaps?

When it was dark I left, locking the compartment and the car after me. I started through the yards and was challenged by a couple of sentries, but when I replied in fluent Turkish they waved me on.

I was on my way to my mother's brother's house when I heard male voices singing in German. I tracked them down to a small café and found soldiers there. I thought I'd drop in for a minute and get the latest war news, although I knew I should have hurried on. A middle-aged corporal was sitting apart from the others. He looked very kind for a corporal, so I asked him if I could sit down for a little while.

I didn't explain my presence in Constantinople. "Is Bulgaria out of the war?"

"Yes."

"How long will Turkey last?"

"Maybe a month."

"And then Austria, and then us." It was odd; up to now I thought we always won—except at Château-Thierry. Now, on no very sound evidence, I was convinced that we had lost.

"Don't despair," said the corporal kindly. "The Fatherland depends on young soldiers like you. You must fight. What would the world be like with our country crushed? We can win with very little. We have armament and food, but we must get gold. The troops haven't been paid for a long time and are beginning to despair. Also,

we must show our allies that we will support them to the last man. They need gold to make their people work harder and produce the things we must have. A few millions in gold to renew the confidence of soldiers and civilians—they would turn the trick."

He went on in this vein for a long time. I had half considered sharing my secret with him, because I knew I'd need help. But after his deluge of patriotism I decided he wasn't the right man.

I left and went to my uncle's house, where my Turkish relatives made a great fuss over me. Some of the men were government functionaries under the Sultan's regime, but with Western ideas. I was given a bed to sleep in, but as soon as I lay down I asked myself: What am I doing here when I ought to be carting that gold to a hiding place? Which of my relatives could I trust? So far as I knew they were honest enough, but that kind of money would corrupt a saint.

I woke one of them who seemed a little sharper than the rest. Half a dozen times I was on the point of telling him everything and asking him to help formulate a plan with me. But each time I stopped short and became incoherent. He must have thought me crazy.

I lay awake till daybreak and then went back to the yards for another look at the car. It was still there, lonely and inviting, like a solitary girl in a bar. But what

could I do alone in broad daylight?

I wandered through the city and found myself in front of German Army Headquarters. The staring guards at the door suddenly made me want to vindicate myself. I thought of my country in her desperate hour and a wave of patriotism swept through me—remember I was only seventeen. I rushed up to the guards and said I was a General's orderly and a lot of other stuff I don't remember. The corporal of the guard was called. Who should it be but my kindly, middle-aged café pal?

"I want to see the Commandant," I said.

"But that's rather difficult, Wilhelm. Can't you tell me what's on your mind?"

"No."

The corporal searched patiently for a solution. "Perhaps you can write it down? Let's go inside."

He took me to a small office and I wrote down a few facts about my trip. He put the paper in an envelope and sealed it. "Kindly come with me."

It is hard to imagine a corporal in the Kaiser's army speaking kindly to a private, but this one did. We went to an office, and I was left in the corridor while he delivered the message. I began to feel bad—sick, I mean. Maybe it was the change from the rich food on the train to the local stuff I had nibbled in my uncle's house.

The corporal came out and said,

"Safe in the hands of the Commandant. Suppose you meet me tonight at eight in the same café we were in last night."

I thanked him and went out the main door. As I was leaving a staff car drove up and a General went in the building.

"Who was that?" I asked one of the guards.

"The Commandant."

I started back into the building, but by this time I was so sick I didn't know what I was doing. I tottered down the street, drenched in sweat. I was leaning against a building, gasping and holding my stomach, when one of my cousins saw me and took me to his home.

He was not one of my Westernized relatives. He took me to a garret in one of the city's rabbit warrens and made a pallet for me on the floor. I was there for days, delirious most of the time. When I was well again, Turkey was out of the war and Germany was getting ready to surrender any day.

I stayed in the house till the Armistice. By a coincidence it seemed that the cost of my cousin's looking after me came to nearly \$1000. I had just enough left to buy a cheap suit of clothes and deck passage to Port Said.

There I worked for the English under a false name, and learned the language; but I knew it was just a question of time till I was discharged because I couldn't keep my mind on my work.

Should I got back to Germany and face possible charges of theft and desertion? One day a tramp steamer bound for Tahiti came to port with a short crew. I was still trying to make up my mind when I signed on as galley hand . . .

When Wilhelm finished, Jim beat me to the question, "Who got it?"

"Not the troops, not the Turkish government. Oh, well, what difference does it make since I didn't?" Wilhelm stared at the palm-covered islet that might have been his prison, and his face brightened. "At least, I've always remained a free man."

The horn blew on *le truc*, one of the station-wagon affairs that serve as buses on Tahiti, and Wilhelm shuffled out.

Jim smiled. "The glass of fashion and the mold of form.' Doesn't Wilhelm remind you a little of Hamlet? A man of many resolutions but few decisions."

I wasn't interested in the resemblance to the melancholy Dane. "How much of that story was the McCoy?"

"All of it except for a couple of details. You see, Wilhelm told the story once before—to a naval officer whose ship touched here a few times in the early Twenties. Like Wilhelm, his mother was from the Middle East and he had spent much of his childhood in the Levant. Like Wilhelm, too, he had relatives in the Turkish government, but in Ataturk's strong new

party, not the decaying caliphate. But unlike Wilhelm, he had brains, great determination, and much cunning.

"He reasoned this way: even if Wilhelm had exaggerated the sum of money involved, some of it must still be around, because what could be safer than hidden gold in those days of wild inflation? Or at least a few newly rich people might be subject to blackmail. So the next time his ship was in the Mediterranean he requested a month's leave and began his search.

"He found that the shipment was planned by a couple of leaders in the Kaiser's tottering government because of the morale-building value it would have on the soldiers and his allies. The planners didn't know that the Count would die, of course, but he was only a nincompoop with a good name. In any event it made little difference. You see, the coins and bullion were nothing but brass."

Jim's impish smile made me a little sick. "You mean first that naval officer, and then you, let Wilhelm ruin his life with fear and remorse when you might have told him the truth?"

"Which brings us to the other detail. Wilhelm forgot to emphasize his duties as the Count's nurse. You see, the family of the deceased ordered an autopsy, and the examiner found enough digitalis in the Count's stomach to poison three men."

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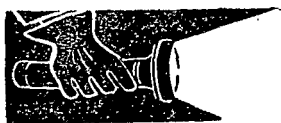
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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Jacques Barzun's *THE DELIGHTS OF DETECTION* (Criterion, \$5.95) includes 4 admirable stories from EQMM; but the ground rules are so strict that few other stories from this magazine would qualify. What Barzun wants, even at the price of dullness, is stories devoted to the detailed examination of physical clues. Readers who feel that even the most formal detective story should include some other attractions will find the Barzun collection both provocative and provoking, and may be happier with the revival of Dorothy L. Sayers' *THE OMNIBUS OF CRIME* (Harcourt, Brace, \$4.95), edited in 1929 but still as fresh and tasteful as it is generous (half a million words!).

★★★★ **THE WYCHERLY WOMAN**, by *Ross Macdonald* (Knopf, \$3.50)

The post-Chandler manner blended with a subtle psychiatric problem and a startling puzzle-plot. Starring Lew Archer.

★★★★ **THE CHINESE GOLD MURDERS**, by *Robert van Gulik* (Harper, \$3.50)

A new triumph in the (literally) wonderful career of Judge Dee in the China of 1300 years ago—rich, ripe, exotic, entrancing.

★★★ **HOURS TO KILL**, by *Ursula Curtiss* (Dodd, Mead, \$2.95)

A "woman's mystery," I suppose, but executed with restraint, taste, wit, economy, surprise . . . and what more can even a man ask?

★★★ **THE BROKEN JIGSAW**, by *Paul Somers* (Harper, \$3.50)

Conventional if skilful first half hardly prepares you for some of the cleverest and quirkiest plot twists to be found outside the equally unpredictable work of Andrew Garve.

Only space limitations prevent my listing all 15 reprint titles (95¢ each) recently released by Dolphin—an impeccable series of masterworks of mystery, old and new. Check with your dealer—and watch Dolphin in EQMM's paperback listings. Hardcover reprints include Rex Stout's *FIVE OF A KIND* (Viking, \$4.50), 2 novels and 3 novelets of Nero Wolfe 1936-1950, and Daphne du Maurier's *THREE ROMANTIC NOVELS OF CORNWALL* (Doubleday, \$4.95), containing the classic *REBECCA* (1938).

AUTHOR:

CRAIG RICE

TITLE:

Malone and the Missing Weapon

TYPE:

Detective Story

DETECTIVE:

John J. Malone

LOCALE:

Somewhere in the United States

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

*It really had nothing to do with the case,
but Malone couldn't get it out of his mind:
why was the sunset on the wrong side?*

THE SUN WAS SETTING BEHIND blue and violet mountains like a red-hot quarter slipping into a slot machine. In the club car of the train seven of the eight passengers glanced casually at the scene, but for the most part they remained preoccupied.

Two of them, who could easily have been sisters, sat over highballs and a card game which they played lazily and disinterestedly. Their sleek, longish hair was the same shade of slightly artificial-looking red, their eyes were the same languorous brown, their skins the exact same shade of make-up. The resemblance had been deliberately heightened by the fact that

they wore identical deep green traveling suits, brown high-heeled calfskin slippers, and carried matching brown pocketbooks. Even their hands, with long, pointed fingernails painted the color of warm blood, looked the same.

The woman with them* wore a neat, navy-blue suit, not quite as costly in appearance, with a respectable white frill at the neck. Her sensible-looking feet were in comfortable oxfords, also navy-blue. Graying hair showed under an old-rose felt hat set squarely on her head, and her gray eyes looked out unhappily at the world through rimless glasses. She seemed almost ill: her skin was pale, with just a

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reprinted by permission of the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

faint suggestion of green around her lips.

The four travelers near them appeared to be members of the same party, though they had little to say to each other. One was a man of medium height and almost military in bearing, with a handsome, tanned, and slightly rosy face, bright blue eyes, spun-silver hair, and a matching mustache that was hardly more than a hint.

Next to him sat a thin, attractive woman whose sandy hair showed just a few streaks of gray, whose eyes were the same bright blue but set in a haggard young face a little on the sallow side. She had a wide, bright red mouth that probably smiled most of the time. Her clothes were extreme almost to the point of being beyond belief, but on her they looked perfectly right.

The two men with them looked Spanish, one tall, slender, and magnificently handsome; the other short, muscular, and restless. The short man looked nervously at the scenery as though he wished it would go away.

The passenger across from them was asleep—indeed, he had been asleep since Albuquerque. He looked just a little as though his previous sleep had been several days ago, and on the floor of a taxicab. His hand-painted tie was loosened and had crept toward the back of his neck; his monogrammed shirt was unbuttoned at the collar; and his well-tailored

suit had stopped being a perfect fit quite some time ago. His five-o'clock-shadow seemed to be operating on Daylight Saving Time, and his eyes, when he opened them, would probably be bloodshot.

Suddenly he did open them, and they were. He peered at the magnificence through the window and said, "It's on the wrong side."

The tall man blinked and said, "I beg your pardon?"

"The sunset. It's on the wrong side." He added irrelevantly, "I'm John J. Malone, attorney."

"I am Elfegio Francisco Vila y Plena," the tall man said in a gracious voice, "and I do not think the sunset can be on the wrong side."

The thinnish woman put down her crossword puzzle, looked out the window, and said, "I don't think so either. And anyway, who cares?"

"I care," John J. Malone said firmly. He buttoned his collar and did his best to straighten his tie. "I care a great deal."

"I am Doctor Douglas Holbrook Burns," the silver-haired man said. There was just a tinge of Scottish burr in his speech. "And I say that the sunset is not on the wrong side." He nodded toward the woman and added "And this is my daughter, Theodosia Fariweke, who does not think so either."

John J. Malone acknowledged the introductions politely and said, "But it is on the wrong side."

The short, nervous man with

the neat black mustache spoke up. "I am Joe Gonzales, Chief of Police of Santa Dolores." He lapsed back into his gloomy silence.

Malone pointed through the window and said "It's over *there*, when it should be over *there*."

"No, no, *no*," Dr. Burns said. "It's over *there* and it's supposed to be over *there*." He turned to the two card-playing redheads. "Maria, my dear, what do you say about the sunset?"

She glanced out the window and said, "Pretty, isn't it."

The other redhead looked at Malone appraisingly, then smiled.

Malone smiled right back at her and said engagingly, "Which side do you say the sunset is on?"

"Right now," she said, "it seems to be on both sides."

The little lawyer sighed. He began to feel that he was fighting a losing battle. At that moment the train lurched around a curve, the gray-haired woman turned a shade more green, got up and went away, the smiling redhead following her solicitously.

Malone sighed again and wondered if the battle were completely lost.

"Trainsick," the other redhead said.

"Why doesn't she go by plane?" Malone asked. "Or drive?"

"Airsick," she said. "Or carsick." Answering an unasked question she added, "If she stays home, she gets worried sick."

Malone thought for a while. "The sunset," he began again doggedly, "is on both sides of the train. That I will concede. But we should be heading into it. Whereas," he finished triumphantly, "we are heading away from it."

Joe Gonzales spoke up again as though he were resuming a private battle of his own. "But I *am* the Chief of Police," he said, and went on gazing moodily through the window.

"Joe," Elfegio Francisco Villa y Plena said gently, "*you* know that you are the Chief of Police. *We* know that you are the Chief of Police. But the mayor, he does not know that you are the Chief of Police."

Joe Gonzales gave him a hurt, dignified look, and said nothing.

"And if you are the Chief of Police of Santa Dolores," Malone demanded suspiciously, "what are you doing riding on this train?"

"He's going to Chicago," the remaining redhead said. "So are we." She reached for the highball the smiling redhead had left behind.

"Maria," the tall man said affectionately, "You will not forget that soon I take you to dinner."

She nodded vaguely at him and said, "Molly always leaves her drink. I always finish it. Economical." She finished it, muttered something about changing her dress for dinner, and went away, swaying slightly.

That reminded Malone of an im-

portant omission, and he buzzed for the steward. "Chicago!" he said. "Wonderful city! I've just come from there."

Dr. Burns said politely, "You mean, you are just *going* there."

Malone said nothing. He knew perfectly well what he meant, but he didn't intend to make an issue of it. Obviously he had fallen among madmen, though so far they appeared to be harmless and charming ones.

Elfegio Francisco Vila y Plena declined Malone's invitation with regret, saying he too had to make ready for dinner. Joe Gonzales went away with him. Dr. Burns and his sandy-haired daughter decided on scotch and water. Malone ordered rye, thought about the sunset, decided it would be safer to make it a double rye, and crossed the aisle to join them at their table.

Half an hour and several drinks later they had become friends. Dr. Burns was a psychiatrist by profession. Malone wondered if Joe Gonzales was his patient but refrained tactfully from asking. No point in insulting a man who might turn out to be really the Chief of Police of Santa Dolores. He offered Dr. Burns a cigar, reflecting that the friendship of a psychiatrist was a handy thing for a defense attorney to have in stock.

Theodosia Fariweke was a divorcee by profession, having just shed her fourth. Included had been a motion picture star, a slightly ti-

tled European, a wealthy Cuban, and a welterweight champion.

As for others—Elfegio, he was told, was a direct descendant of the original conquistadores, and owned a right smart parcel of land in New Mexico, including a couple of mines, nobody knew how many head of cattle, and five mansion-size ranch houses. In addition, he was a heavy investor in a highly profitable private sanitarium owned by Dr. Burns. Joe Gonzales had been his close friend since childhood.

The redheads were not sisters at all, but cousins, and rather distant cousins at that. A chance family resemblance, a good hair-dye job, and a pair of reasonably good voices had sent them fairly well along on the road to TV stardom.

"Until lately," Theodosia Fariweke said. "Now the act is over. Elfie came out to visit us and look over papa's joint near Hollywood and—"

"Joint!" Dr. Burns interrupted indignantly. "It is a perfect little paradise!"

And in that location, Malone reflected, remembering his last visit to Hollywood, it should be a perfect little gold mine.

"Well, Elfie lamed the Hilery girls, and fell. For a while he courted them both. Then it narrowed down to Maria. They're going to be married in Chicago. I hate to think what Molly felt about that, or about breaking up the act. But she's taken

it like a sport, and she's going along to Chicago."

Malone opened his mouth to protest and closed it again firmly.

"They met," the doctor said solemnly, "when Maria was a patient of mine for a brief while. Nothing serious. Just a minor disturbance."

"You mean," his irreverent daughter said, "you kept her from being juggled for drunk driving."

Malone said hastily, "And their aunt?"

"An excellent woman," Dr. Burns said.

"But she's no more their aunt than you are," Theodosia Fariweke said. "She's a broken-down unemployed bit-player they got from a casting agency because Molly thought it would look better for the Hilery Sisters to travel with a gray-haired aunt. Molly would." She inserted a cigarette in a long amber holder, "Don't get me wrong. Molly's a swell gal and I like her. Maria's a bit of a lush, but I like her too."

"And what happens to the imitation aunt after the wedding?" Malone asked. "And to Molly Hilery?"

Theodosia Fariweke shrugged. "I suppose Auntie will go back to the salt mines of bit playing. Maybe Molly can snare a millionaire for herself. I hope so. Or go on with a solo act—though Maria really was the one with the voice; Molly was just the extra effects. Or maybe Elfie will pension 'em both off. He could do it and never miss it."

Malone began to unwrap a cigar. It wasn't any of his business, and he didn't find it particularly interesting business. He glanced out the window. The sun had long set, but a glow, shading from pale flame to paler violet, hovered behind the dark mountains.

"And you, Mr. Malone?" the doctor asked pleasantly, "You are vacationing?"

"Not quite," Malone said. "I'm on my way to see a bookie. In Hollywood."

"You mean in Chicago," Dr. Burns said.

The little lawyer found himself wishing that Joe Gonzales would come back. He wondered if he ought to ask Dr. Burns if he only thought he was a doctor. Or if Theodosia Fariweke only thought she was a divorcee. For that matter, maybe he himself only thought he was a lawyer. Everything was getting entirely too confusing, and he decided he might as well plunge in and settle things once and for all.

"I have just left Chicago," he said, speaking even more firmly than Dr. Burns had done. "I am on my way to Hollywood. To see a bookie."

"A long way to go to place a bet," Theodosia Fariweke said.

Dr. Burns said gravely "Would you mind very much if I looked at your ticket?"

"Not in the least," Malone said cheerfully. "It's in my topcoat pock-

et in my compartment. I'll run right back and get it."

It developed that Dr. Burns and his daughter were also going back to their compartment. Malone rose and went along, realizing several cars later that he was in hopelessly unfamiliar territory.

"If you don't remember the number of your compartment," Dr. Burns said, "perhaps we had better call the conductor."

Malone shook his head. "No need to bother him," he said. "I remember exactly where my compartment is. Because just before I went to the club car I looked out the window, and there was the prettiest little lake with a grove of trees beside it."

This time it was the doctor who looked as though he wished Joe Gonzales would come back. "We will look for the conductor," he announced in a positive voice. "But first we will go back to my compartment and sample the very excellent scotch that Elfegio gave me for the journey."

That, Malone felt, was a sensible plan of action. The conductor, whom he remembered as a very dull character, could be looked for any time. He settled down in the doctor's compartment, lit his cigar, looked out the window at the sunset's last faint glow, and decided he didn't care which side it was on.

It was exactly at that moment when they heard the scream—a high-pitched, startled scream. It came from next door.

Malone reached the adjoining compartment first and flung open the door. Behind him he heard a milder scream, from Theodosia Fariweke, and a sudden gasp from Dr. Burns.

The first scream had come from Molly Hilery, who was hunched in the far corner of the compartment, her arms held over her white face as though to ward off the terrible sight, her hands so tightly clenched that if her nails had not been trimmed so short they would have drawn blood.

The once lovely Maria Hilery lay limply half on the seat, half on the floor.

"Her throat—" Theodosia Fariweke gasped, and turned even paler.

The imitation aunt opened the door of the washroom where she had popped out of sight, and slammed the door shut again.

"All right," Malone said wearily. "Now we will call the conductor."

Theodosia Fariweke rose to the occasion like a whole police department plus a couple of trained nurses. She put a firm arm around the shaking Molly and led her next door. She came back, half hauled the gray-haired woman out of the washroom and steered her, too, into the next compartment. She told her father and the scowling Malone to stay put and hold everything until the conductor got there.

The conductor and porter bustled up the corridor, shooing the

alarmed passengers back into their compartments on the way. The conductor was a large, frowning man, the porter a small, wide-eyed, and frightened one.

"Well," the conductor said, shutting the door and giving the body an annoyed look, "What's been goin on here?"

Malone pointed wordlessly at the body.

"I see it," the conductor said. "But what happened to her?"

"Throat cut," Dr. Burns said. "Jugular vein severed."

Malone added, "She's dead."

"Naturally," the conductor said coldly. He looked at Malone and said "And just what are *you* doing on this train?"

Malone's horrible conviction, that everybody else on the train was mad was beginning to be replaced by an even more horrible conviction that everybody else on the train was sane. He drew a long breath.

"I," he said firmly and decisively, and prepared to brook no nonsense about sunsets, "am going to Hollywood."

Before the conductor could answer, Elfegio Francisco Vila y Plena burst into the compartment, closely followed by Joe Gonzales. He looked at the body, gave an anguished cry, and put his hand over his eyes. The conductor looked at him with respectful recognition, and then at Joe Gonzales.

"I," Joe Gonzales, said, "am the Chief of Police of Santa Dolores."

This time nobody bothered to say, "No."

The conductor looked suspiciously at Malone and said to Dr. Burns, "Is this man one of your patients?"

The silver-haired doctor shook his head vehemently. "He is a casual acquaintance we met in the club car. I do not believe he is in need of a psychiatrist. And in any event, he had nothing to do with this."

The conductor looked skeptical and displeased.

"He was right next door with us," Dr. Burns went on. "We met, as I said, in the club car, and we came back to my compartment for a drink. We were there, the three of us, when we heard the scream."

This time the conductor looked puzzled. He frowned at Malone and said, "How did you get on this train, and where are you going?"

"I got on this train in the usual manner," Malone said, a little huffily, "And I told you, I'm going to Hollywood."

"No," the conductor said, "You are not." He decided to drop the subject, glanced around the compartment, and said, "Where's the weapon?"

A quick search revealed no sign of one. The conductor appeared to go into brief conference with himself, and then told the entire party to go next door. There were immediate things to be attended to, he told them, and in the meantime,

he wanted all of them to stay right there.

Malone hesitated for an unhappy moment. He didn't want to mix himself up in whatever was going on, and he knew that he inevitably would. Well, perhaps he could prove that he was a better man than Chief-of-Police-questionmark Joe Gonzales. He thought for a second moment, looking over the scene. In one of his pockets he managed to locate a crumpled ten dollar bill, smoothed it out, folded it very neatly, and managed to slip it unobtrusively to the porter, slipping a low-murmured message along with it.

The porter palmed the bill quickly, obviously wondering why the strange gentleman should want every speck of dust from the floor of that compartment saved and given to him, but he nodded.

"I collect souvenirs," Malone whispered cheerfully.

"Now please, sir," the conductor said, "you, too, step along into this next compartment."

Malone stepped along, wondering what was going to happen next, and just what he was going to do about it. The train was slowing to a stop. Dr. Burns produced a new bottle of the excellent scotch, and just in time, too. Everybody relaxed a little and began to look a shade better.

"And now," Malone said, wishing it were rye, "just what happened?"

"I was reading a magazine," Molly whispered. "Aunt Emily was in the—washroom. She—wasn't feeling very well."

"She was as sick as a dog," Aunt Emily said, "but she feels better now." The scotch not only seemed to be curing the trainsickness, but was making her revert to casting agency type.

"I went to sleep," Molly said. "I heard Maria come in and flop down. She—wasn't feeling very well either."

"Heard her through the door," Aunt Emily said briskly. "She was as drunk as a skunk."

"Then," Molly said weakly, and ignoring her, "I thought I heard the door close. It woke me. I don't know how long I'd been asleep. Then I saw her and screamed."

Elfegio Francisco Vila y Plena groaned. Joe Gonzales sighed deeply, his brown eyes melancholy. If he made one more remark about being Chief of Police, Malone reflected, it was going to be his last one.

"But," Theodosia Fariweke said with a puzzled frown, "the door of our compartment was open—to let the cigar smoke out." She glanced just a little reproachfully at Malone. "We didn't see anybody go past."

"And the porter was out in the passage," Dr. Burns said. "If he'd seen anyone go in or out of that compartment, he'd have said so by now."

After that no one spoke, and no one looked at anyone else. Malone gazed out the window at a landscape that had now become very still. There was no light at all in the sky any more, only purple shadows. At last he remarked "Sun's gone down."

"But not on the wrong side," Dr. Burns said very quietly.

The silence dragged on and on, a gloomy, dispirited one. Three rounds of scotch and no conversation later, the conductor came in with a tall stranger and introduced him as a deputy sheriff. Malone hoped ardently that Joe Gonzales would keep his mouth shut.

But the deputy sheriff broke in to a grin and said, "Joel!"

Malone made a startled, half-strangling sound. The deputy sheriff turned to him and said "My good friend Joe Gonzales, Chief of Police of Santa Dolores!"

The little lawyer closed his eyes. He was glad Dr. Burns was a psychiatrist. He hoped Dr. Burns would do something soon, preferably for him.

The word brought by the conductor and the deputy sheriff was thoroughly unhelpful and disquieting. The compartment next door had been searched right down to the last quarter-inch. There was not the faintest sign of a weapon. Not even so much as a straight pin that would have left a scratch. Would Miss Hilery mind if they looked through her purse?

Malone hardly bothered to watch. He knew what they were going to find. Cigarettes, lighter, compact, lipstick, emery board, billfold, and a few odds and ends. But absolutely nothing, not even a nail file, that would have cut Maria Hilery's throat.

He thought it over unhappily. He disliked having anything unpleasant happen to people—especially murder—even when it happened to unpleasant people. Aunt Emily had been busy being trainsick, the washroom door closed. No one could have carried a bloody knife in there and dropped it down the drain. And there was no question of Aunt Emily's being genuinely trainsick. And no one had seen or heard an intruder enter the compartment.

But there was no sign of a weapon. Nor had there been any possible way to dispose of one. That was the other strange thing—that there wouldn't even be so much as a pair of manicure scissors, as would be expected in the traveling bags of three women.

He opened his eyes just in time to see the porter arrive at the door, carrying a folded paper very carefully. He started to hand it to Malone, looked at the deputy, and paused.

"The gentleman wanted the dust from next door," he said.

The deputy grabbed the paper and stared at Malone.

"Don't spill it," Malone said wear-

ily. "It's the weapon."

Dr. Burns gave Malone a look of searching and professional interest. No one else moved.

The little lawyer turned to Molly. "You probably doped her first," he said. "You knew she always finished up your drink, and it would have been easy for you to dope that last one in the club car . . . you hated her, didn't you?—for grabbing off the rich boy friend. And maybe you still hoped, with Maria gone, that he'd court you again . . ."

Her face had turned white.

"But the weapon," the deputy sheriff objected.

"In that paper," Malone said, "It has to be." He began to unwrap a cigar. "There wasn't even a pair of nail scissors or a nail file. She must have disposed of those some time back, so there wouldn't be any weapon, and no one could suspect."

He went on, "But there was an emery board. Right now, she couldn't scratch a mosquito bite with those very short nails. But back in the club car I noticed they were long and pointed, probably even sharpened. She must have used the thumbnail—it's the strongest. Spent her time while she waited for Maria filing down the other ones. After the murder she filed down the thumbnail, fast. And then she screamed."

"But the proof—" the conductor began, his mind on railroad policy and possible lawsuits.

Malone said, "Any good police laboratory will find it there in the dust."

Molly Hilery sprang at him, her face terrible in its fury. But the conductor and the deputy sheriff moved even faster . . .

Later, back in the club car, Malone managed to change the subject to Chicago night clubs. He was now on first-name terms with Theodosia Fariweke with whom, he discovered, he had much in common.

"But I *am* the Chief of Police of Santa Dolores," Joe Gonzales said, not unexpectedly.

Malone had had enough of that, and said so.

"But," Dr. Burns said, "he is. He does not have delusions. For many years he has been the Chief of Police. Then the mayor, who appoints the Chief of Police, died. The new mayor appointed someone else. But the town recognizes no one but Joe Gonzales. Consequently, he performs all the duties—and the other man collects the salary."

Malone thought that was an unusual way to ruin a police department, and said that too.

"My good friend Elfegio Francisco Vila y Plena," Joe Gonzales said, "he himself pays me a salary." It was the only other remark he made on the entire trip.

The conductor came by and paused in front of Malone. He thanked Malone for the fourth time for saving the railroad so much

trouble. Then he asked just what Malone was doing on the train for Chicago.

"But I am going to Hollywood," Malone said, a little weakly now.

"Obviously," the conductor said, "you got off the right train at Albuquerque. You strolled through the station. You chatted with the Indians. You visited the little shops. You visited the bar."

Malone nodded affirmatively to everything.

"At last you thought you saw your train, and got on," the conductor said gently. "It looked exactly like your train. But your train had gone, and this one was going in the opposite direction."

The little lawyer looked at him miserably and said nothing.

"Don't worry," the conductor said reassuringly. "Happens all the time. We'll put you off at the next stop, you'll be put on the next train going west, and bang, you'll be in Hollywood before you know it."

Malone sighed. He looked at the landscape. He looked at his new friends. He thought about the Chez Paree and the Blue Casino and Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

"Don't *you* worry," he said, settling down in his chair and buzzing for the steward. "I like it right here where I am. And I like Chicago even better. The sunset was on the right side after all."

A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to announce that the next issue of EQMM will be distributed by the Curtis Circulation Company, distributors of the other Davis publications, i.e. SCIENCE and MECHANICS, the SCIENCE and MECHANICS Handbooks and MOBILE HOME JOURNAL.

Due to this move, the distribution of EQMM will be greatly expanded, which means that you, our readers, will be able to purchase copies at many additional newsstands.

In the event you find that EQMM is not on sale at a particular newsstand, whether it be your corner newsstand, drug store or supermarket, we would appreciate your calling this to the attention of your news dealer and ask him to call his local magazine distributor in order that copies may be placed there for all future issues.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

a new story by

AUTHOR:

BERKELY MATHER

TITLE:

Cri de Coeur

TYPE:

Suspense Story

LOCALE:

England

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

His wife's indecision was maddening, and when he looked at his face, he saw a white mask of frozen rage . . .

CHRYLLA WAS CRYING AGAIN when they arrived at the airport. Clive fought down the surge of rage that almost choked him. He parked by the Departures Hall and turned to her with painful patience.

"Listen," he said, "your mother has invited you to Rome for a month. You said you wanted to go—then you didn't—and finally we have another session of gentle tears. Make up your mind!"

"I—I do—and I don't—" she faltered.

He gazed at the car roof with the air of a long-suffering yogi on a bed of nails. Then something snapped. "You're going," he ground out, and turned and

opened the back door of the car for the luggage porter. "Two suitcases and a dressing-case," he told the man. "Flight A24—Rome."

"My—my jewel box?" she asked.

"Inside the big suitcase. I put it there myself. If you carry it with you, you'll lose the damn thing again the way you did in Milan." He handed her the passport. "Go and get this stamped."

He turned and looked back when he came to the swing doors of the Departures Hall. She was still standing by the car, alternately dabbing at her eyes with a balled-up handkerchief and fumbling in her handbag as the porter pulled the cases from the rear seat. The reflection of his own face in the glass

of the door pulled him up short. It was a white mask of frozen rage.

He pulled himself together and lit a cigarette, but the smoke tasted hot and acrid and it burned his already dry throat. It was a drink he needed. He ground out the cigarette under his heel and joined the queue at the ticket window, then went and searched through the crowd at the baggage scales for their porter. He got the cases weighed and labelled and saw them on their way up the baggage chute and then, as the Tannoys were crackling their last summons for the flight, he joined her at Channel 9.

He handed her the ticket. "All stamped," he said. "That's your baggage chit—you claim your stuff at Customs the other end. Don't lose it."

He expected another outburst of sobbing and was relieved when it didn't come. She hesitated for a moment and seemed about to say something—then she shrugged slightly, sighed, and turned and followed the other passengers toward the channel to the tarmac bus. He was halfway across to the bar when he heard her call.

He wheeled, fighting for his self-control. "You'll miss the damn thing," he said through clenched teeth. "What the devil have you thought of now?"

Without a word she pushed an envelope into his hand, turned again, and raced up the channel.

He stuffed it into his pocket and breasted the bar. He didn't even taste his first double whiskey, but the third pulled him together.

He went back to the car and sat and waited until the plane roared overhead; then he started up and drove slowly out of the exit. One fifteen. Exactly one hour to go—that is, if it worked properly. He shrugged impatiently. Of course it would work. A Swiss precision traveling clock, a fulminate percussion cap, and seven pounds of plastic explosive in the jewel box?

It would scatter that plane across twenty miles of the Haute-Savoie, and the experts would still be theorizing over the accident in ten years' time.

He wondered how and when the news would come through. He hoped it would reach him when there were people around so that they could hear and remember his terrible cry and then see him blanch—how did one blanch?—and hurry to the telephone to ring the airline to beg for news of possible survivors. He'd do it well, as he did everything, particularly when the payoff amounted to £25,000 of life insurance—and Ella.

He glanced at his watch. Seven minutes to go, and he was already nearing Winchester. He must have been driving fast—too fast. He didn't want to reach Longlands too early and when he did, he

wanted to be calm and composed. He eased his foot off the accelerator and coasted to a stop under a way-side tree.

Three minutes to go now.

He fumbled for a cigarette and his hand came into contact with the letter she had given him. He looked at the one scrawled word—*Clive*—on the envelope, and wondered what was in it. The usual thing, no doubt. "Can't we try and make a fresh start? Can't we pull together and try to get our marriage off the rocks?"—and the rest of her clichés. Too late now, my dear.

One minute to go.

Should he burn it without reading it? No—he'd have a look at her last impassioned *cri de coeur*. He slit the envelope. There were only a few words.

I have tried—you know I have tried. I tried right up to this minute, but I can't take any more. I'm not coming back. I'm leaving you. I wish Ella joy of her bargain. Chrylla.

And then his eye dropped to the postscript.

I'm taking nothing of yours with me. I've put the jewel box in the boot of the car.

He was in the frantic act of leaping out when it went off.

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a new story by

AUTHOR: **HAROLD R. DANIELS**

TITLE: ***The Haunted Woodshed***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Mary Comstock and Deputy Sheriff Redfield

LOCALE: Morrow Corners, U.S.

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Each time the retired schoolteacher went into the gloom of the woodshed, something in her shivered, and she felt a lurking and overpowering evil . . .*

THROUGH THIRTY YEARS OF schoolteaching, Mary Comstock dreamed of the day she could retire to a small New England village and live out her remaining years quietly raising dahlias. She might even, she dreamed, be accepted into some small intellectual group so that there would be evenings of good conversation and music.

The house that she actually bought was not in a village but was located half a mile from it. It had been a farm and the price was far less than a similar house in town would have cost. Even so, it took

more of her small savings than she would have liked. Two acres of land went with the house. She would, she told herself, raise her own vegetables and perhaps have a few left over for sale at the roadside.

She bought the house after two week-end inspection visits. Mr. Purcell, the real estate agent who went with her on the visits, wasted much time fussily pointing out the merits of the house—wasted it because Mary was in love with the house from the moment she saw it. It was a dignified little white salt-box in excellent condition. Having

seen it, Mary knew that no other house could possibly meet her needs so exactly.

Except for the woodshed.

She didn't like that from the start and actually came to fear it. The fear began a week after she said her goodbyes to her fellow teachers—they gave her a silver-plated tea set—and moved to Morrow Corners.

Mary Comstock, at that time, was in her late fifties—a small, indomitable figure of a woman not given to foolish fears. She had faced down too many classes of bullying boys, too many stuffed-shirt school boards, to be a coward.

The woodshed was perhaps twenty feet long by fifteen feet wide. It was made of heavy unpainted planks that had mellowed and silvered with the seasons. There was a wide, heavy door in the front and a tiny window in the back. It was actually a rather picturesque little building and Mary did not understand quite what it was that she disliked about it. Certainly the proportions were neat enough.

She had glanced into it on her first visit to the farm, but she did not go inside it until a week after she had moved and had finished setting up her own furniture. She told herself that she was not really avoiding the woodshed—there were simply too many other things to attend to.

At the end of the first week she went out to inspect it.

There was a crude bar-and-socket arrangement on the door, so arranged that the bar would ride up on a sloping wedge and drop into the socket if the door were slammed hard enough. She lifted the free end of the bar from the socket and pulled the door back. It creaked and held back against her pull, as if reluctant to open. When she released the door it swung back as if to close again. She said in small impatience, "Darned thing," and pulled it all the way open so that it banged against the shed wall and shivered to a standstill.

Mary was a sensitive and imaginative woman. When she stepped from the brilliant sunshine into the gloom of the woodshed she was almost overwhelmed by a feeling of melancholy so tangible that it was almost like a blow. She recoiled from it and only a fine sense of the ridiculous kept her from retreating back to the sunlight that now seemed the brighter by contrast.

She said aloud—and her own voice startled her—"Pshaw, Mary Comstock. It's only an old woodshed. You act as if it were Madame Tussaud's." But she had to force herself to remain in the building.

It seemed almost bucolically harmless. The floor was of hard-packed dirt embedded with countless wood chips and scraps of bark. Thin light came through the tiny window high up on the wall. Dust motes danced in a bright bar of sunlight.

A lonesome bluebottle fly droned wearily against the dusty glass, butting his head against it fatalistically.

She stayed in the shed for ten minutes or so, planning its possible rearrangement into a potting shed. She left it before she was done with her planning and she scolded herself for this as she slammed the heavy door.

"Poltergeists. Witches. Haunts. You should be ashamed of yourself! Next you'll be looking for elves down in the orchard."

Nevertheless, she did not go near the woodshed for another week—because, she told herself, she was much too busy. From time to time she would glance at the woodshed from the house or the yard and each time she shivered and felt cold.

Shame made her visit the building again. When she opened the door she felt the same sense of overpowering, lurking evil. She stayed only five minutes on that second occasion and it took all her considerable will power to make her remain that long . . .

The next time she drove into Morrow Corners in the little coupe that had been a personal friend for a dozen years, she stopped in at the office of Ben Purcell, the real estate man who had sold her the house.

He seemed nervous when she sat down across the desk from him. "I hope everything is going well, Mrs. Comstock," he said. "No leaks in the roof or anything like that?"

"It hasn't rained since I bought the house," she reminded him. "And it's Miss Comstock, as you should remember from the deed papers. I wish you'd stop fidgeting, Mr. Purcell. I bought the house and I'm perfectly happy with it. I merely want to know who lived there before I did."

Purcell looked relieved. "Why, Henry Wienowski had the place before you did, Miss Comstock. Of course, he deeded it over to the bank to sell for him two years ago—when he moved to the big Platt farm he bought. Mighty good farmer, Henry is. I don't care what the talk was."

"What talk?"

Purcell mopped his forehead with an outsize handkerchief. "Oh—just talk. Didn't amount to anything."

Mary leaned forward. "I taught school for thirty years, Mr. Purcell. I'm not an easy woman for even a grown man to fool. What are you hiding back about my house? Did some tragedy take place there?"

Purcell said anxiously, "No tragedy, exactly. It's just that Mrs. Wienowski disappeared. Let's see—that was five years ago. There was a lot of talk that Henry did away with her. Nothing was ever proved, though."

"Did they arrest him?"

"Sure. Held him for a while but they couldn't find any evidence. So they had to let him go. He went straight back to his place—your

place, now—and lived on there until he bought the Platt farm." Purcell paused. "I hope you don't think I wouldn't have told you all this if you'd asked, Miss Comstock."

She stood up to leave. "I'm sure you would," she said drily.

Because she was reasonably stubborn, Mary Comstock went into the woodshed three times within the next week. Each time the inherent evil of the place drove her out. By this time she was thoroughly angry with herself and with the woodshed.

"I suppose," she told herself, "you think that poor woman's body is buried under the dirt. I suppose you don't think that that's the very first place the police would look if they thought a murder had been committed."

The week went slowly. She had already made the little house immaculate. Now she looked for things to do. From a bolt of butcher's linen that she found in the cellar she made drapes for her bedroom. She painted. She scrubbed. She planted a small garden. And for the sake of economy, she bought a young pig, planning to have it butchered and stored in the cooperative freezer plant. When she visited the plant, a pleasant young man named Barney Pace gave her the key to her private locker.

"That will be four dollars," he told her. "The plant is always open, but any time you want butchering done you'll have to come around in

the daytime. I'll be here, or my Dad."

They walked back into the cool depths of the freezer plant. Barney borrowed her key back and opened her locker for her. "I'll probably butcher your shoat in the cool of the evening," he told her. "The meat will go in here."

The locker was about the size of a file-cabinet drawer. When Barney opened it, a wisp of white vapor curled out. "My," she said. "It's certainly cold enough." She glanced around. "What in the world do you keep in those big lockers?"

The big lockers were similar to her own but many times larger. "Farmers rent them," Barney told her. "They can store whole beef carcasses in them. In the old days they used to butcher at home and pickle the beef for the winter. Now they have prime meat the year round. Any time they want a roast or a steak they just come in and get it. People in town do the same thing. Buy beef when it's cheap and store it."

On her next trip to town Mary stopped at the library. With her teaching background she was able to establish an immediate and warm friendship with the librarian, whose name was Margaret Miller. They chatted for two hours in between the book borrowers.

Mrs. Miller was voluble, frankly delighted that a genuine booklover had moved to Morrow Corners. Yes, she agreed, it was a lovely lit-

tle house. And yes, she remembered when Mrs. Wienowski disappeared. Everyone was sure that the terrible-tempered Henry had murdered her—such a pity that nothing could be done about it. He used to beat her terribly, people said. Yes, she had known her. A thin little woman, always looking over her shoulder. Always afraid. And yes, she would be delighted to come and visit with Mary. This last was when Mary Comstock finally got up to leave.

From the library Mary went straight to the Sheriff's substation. The deputy in charge was a big, slow-moving man with a red face and sympathetic eyes. His name was Redfield. He pulled out a chair for Mary and sat down across from her.

"Now then," he said pleasantly, "what can I do for you, Mrs. Comstock?"

She said absently, "Miss. And before I tell you anything at all, I want you to know that I am not a silly or a timid woman."

He said reassuringly, "Wouldn't occur to me at all, Miss Comstock."

She told him about her sensations whenever she went into the woodshed. When she finished, she half expected to find him smiling at her, humoring her. He wasn't smiling.

He shook his head slowly. "There isn't any body under that woodshed—if that's what you're thinking. I know because I helped

dig it up. You see, Ma'am, we're all pretty sure that Henry Wienowski killed his wife. But being sure and proving it are two different matters."

Redfield leaned back in his chair. "About that feeling you get when you go into the woodshed—well, I just don't know. I sure wouldn't laugh at you for it though. An old farmer by the name of Hansen hung himself in his own barn not far from my place. I helped cut him down. I still get gooseflesh when I go near his place—and I'm a pretty hard-headed man."

Mary asked, "That man—that Wienowski—he's still walking around as free as a bird?"

"As free as a bird. Makes me want to turn in my badge."

"She never told any of her friends that she was afraid her husband would kill her? I mean, if she did, couldn't you arrest him on suspicion?"

"She never had any friends. Henry wouldn't let her. No, she just disappeared from the face of the earth. She used to deliver eggs to a dozen customers here in town. One day she just didn't show up. The next day Henry brought the eggs around himself and said his wife had gone home to visit her folks for a spell. They're Polish people—live in a town in Minnesota."

"Did you write to see if she ever got there?" Mary asked.

"Did better than that. I telephoned. Cost the town a few dol-

lars, guess. You see, Henry had been in trouble with me before. Once he beat his wife so bad she had to be put in the hospital. Brought her in himself and damned if he didn't want to know how much it was going to cost before he'd leave her. She wouldn't make a complaint against him though. Too scared. Said she fell down the cellar stairs—and her with fist and boot marks all over her. After she turned up missing I went out there and nosed around. Couldn't do too much without evidence but I got her people's address from Henry and I called them right away. They hadn't heard from her in years. I asked Henry how she left town. He told me she went on a Greyhound bus. I checked at the depot and they hadn't sold a ticket to anywhere in Minnesota for months. So I arrested Henry right then and there. That's when we searched the place. And we really searched it. We poked into every foot of ground with iron rods. Used bloodhounds too. Dug up the cellar. Dug up your woodshed—every inch of it. But she wasn't there."

Mary, pitying the vanished Mrs. Wienowski, said, "The poor creature. What do you suppose he did with her?"

Redfield shrugged. "Don't know, ma'am. Maybe drove off in the woods somewhere and buried her. I just hope that some day her body—what's left of it—will turn up. I'd like to see Henry hang."

After leaving the Sheriff's office, Mary drove down the street to the freezer locker to pick up chops for supper. Young Barney Pace was at the meat block. He smiled as she came in. "Good day Miss Comstock. Get something from your locker for you?"

She handed him the key. "Please, Barney. Cut me off two nice rib chops if you will."

"Sure, Ma'am."

She watched him cut the young pig's carcass. "I wish I could afford to rent a bigger locker and buy a quarter of beef," she said pensively. "Though I suppose it would be foolish to have that much meat stored away just for myself."

Barney wrapped her chops in brown paper and handed them to her. "Not if you bought a rib quarter. You might think about it, Miss Comstock. Beef's a lot cheaper that way."

A tall, stoop-shouldered man pushed past the meat block into the locker storage room. He wore faded denims and a much-washed blue shirt that stretched tautly across his hulking frame. Barney said in a low voice, "That's the man who used to own your place. You know him?"

"You mean that's Mr. Wienowski?"

"That's him. Killed his wife and got away with it."

Mary listened to Barney's chatter with only half an ear. She had glimpsed Henry Wienowski's face. She has seen the brutal jaw and

the narrowed, avaricious eyes. All her life she had prided herself in not judging people by appearances, but now she had seen a face that she knew was capable of murder.

After a minute or two Wienowski came stalking back from the locker room. Over his shoulder he had slung the carcass of a sheep. Wrapped in butcher linen, the frozen flesh showed dark red through the cloth. The legs of the carcass stuck rigidly out in all directions. Mary Comstock breathed a soft, "Oh, no!" and hurried to her car.

She found Deputy Redfield dozing at his desk and was impatient with him. "Sheriff," she said, "Henry Wienowski has one of those big lockers at the freezer plant."

"I can't arrest him for that. Every farmer in the valley has a locker."

She bent toward him throwing the words like darts. "Did you look *in his locker* when his wife disappeared?"

Redfield swallowed. "Lord," he said. "No." He stood up, no longer looking kindly but grim and purposeful. "Miss Comstock," he said, "I'm three kinds of a fool. It's just that a thing like that wouldn't occur— You'd better stay here."

She shook her head. "I'm going with you."

Barney Pace smiled again when Deputy Redfield walked in with Mary behind him. He saw the expression on Redfield's face and stopped smiling. "What's the matter, Ed?"

"Have you got a duplicate key to Henry Wienowski's locker?"

"No. I've got a key to the regular lock but Henry put his own padlock on when he rented it."

"Never mind. Give me the key you've got and fetch a flashlight."

Barney opened Wienowski's locker with the duplicate key. The padlock was attached to a chain and there was enough slack so that the door could be opened about an inch. A wisp of cold vapor ghosted out and Mary drew back a step in spite of herself. Redfield looked at the padlock. "Cheap job," he grunted, and sent Barney to fetch a hammer and screwdriver.

The Deputy placed the screwdriver in the staple of the padlock and struck the base with the hammer. At the second blow the staple snapped open. "Glad I didn't have to break it," Redfield said. He opened the door wide and focused Barney's flashlight.

Inside the locker were nearly a dozen objects, the lower ones blurred by heavy coats of frost. They were lumpy, amorphous, unrecognizable. Redfield dragged one out. It went *thump* on the floor and Mary gasped.

Barney said, "Hog." He said later, "Another hog. Sheep. Side of beef."

The last of the cloth-wrapped bundles was frozen solidly to the floor of the locker. Barney had to help Redfield tug and haul at it until it slid, finally, out onto the floor.

It was long and there was a round protuberance at one end.

Mary looked away. A head, she thought, a woman's head. She decided that she was going to be sick.

And then Redfield grunted again. "Veal carcass. That's all. Shove them back in, will you, Barney? Try to get 'em in the same order we took them out."

To Mary Comstock he said, "I'm almost glad we didn't find anything. I've got some beef of my own in this room. Don't think I'd care to eat any of it if we'd—well, you know what I mean."

She said in a small voice, "I suppose you think I'm a perfect simpleton."

"Don't think anything of the kind. You were dead-right. It had to be checked out."

In the days that followed, Mary's love for the little saltbox house deepened in direct proportion to her revulsion for the woodshed. More and more she was drawn to the place in spite of her abhorrence—just as a motorist will glance and glance again at the bloody and crumpled victims of an accident seen in passing.

Mary's new friend, the librarian, visited her frequently now. Deputy Redfield dropped in twice for iced tea—and if he was a mite disappointed that Mary kept no beer on ice for visiting lawmen, he nevertheless came the second time.

She was happy, she told herself.

The woodshed was only the minor flaw that set off the perfection of the whole. She was frankly interested in the Wienowski case and she pumped Redfield about it shamelessly on both his visits. Once he became a little annoyed.

"This is a country village, Mary," he told her, "but we've got access to the State Bureau of Investigation and those are crack men. I held Henry Wienowski for four days after I first picked him up and those men helped me search the place. There wasn't any loose soil. There weren't any bloodstains in the house or in Henry's truck—and I mean to tell you, those State detectives went over everything with microscopes. It wasn't just a matter of a hick sheriff like me making a halfway search."

"I'm sorry, Ed," she told him. "I didn't mean to sound as if I thought you weren't capable. Have some more tea and we'll talk about something else."

A few days after Redfield's second visit, Mary set out half a dozen pots of Impatience in the front garden. When she was finished, she picked up the empty pots and started for the house. On the way to the back door she stopped.

"You've got a perfectly good shed for these things," she told herself, "and you're not going to let your imagination keep you from using it."

She turned toward the woodshed.

As she came closer to it she felt the familiar loathing. The day was perfectly still and hot. When she opened the door a bluebottle fly—it could have been the same one she had seen weeks earlier—was still bumbling against the window. Folding the door all the way back, she stepped inside—into the same aura of brooding melancholy that she had felt before.

"Now don't just set those pots down and run," she told herself firmly. "You take your time and stack them neatly in the corner where they belong."

As she stepped toward the corner she felt a rush of air. Turning, with an involuntary cry of fright, she saw the heavy door slam to behind her, cutting off most of the light so that she stood in semi-darkness. In near-panic she ran to the door. There was a wooden latch-piece stuck through it from the outside that was supposed to make it possible to lift the heavy wooden bar from the inside. She pried up on it too quickly and it snapped in her hands with a powdery puff of dry rot.

"Don't panic," she whispered. "Keep a grip on yourself. Get a stick or something and stick it through the latch hole."

There was no stick small enough to go through the hole. The door was solid and tight-fitting. Mary tried for ten minutes to get it open before she stopped to catch her breath.

Standing in the dark, panting, she glanced down at the floor. Of course. She could dig her way out. She searched for a small log and found one. It was beveled at the point where some forgotten woodsman had chopped it. The point sank easily into the dirt close to the wall and she remembered what Redfield had said. "We dug every inch of that woodshed up."

When she had loosened a quantity of the dry soil, she scooped it aside with her hands and scraped some more with the sharp stick. She had made a hole almost two feet deep when she came across the butcher linen.

The bones that were wrapped in the linen were dirt-stained. She thought at first that they were wood chips—except that no wood chip should be shaped like a human skull . . .

Half an hour later she broke through the ground outside the woodshed. It was typical of Mary Comstock that she stopped to wash and put on a clean dress before she went to fetch Deputy Redfield.

Later he told her about it. "We went out and got him this afternoon. He was like an animal. It took three of us to wrestle him down and then we had to chain him up with cow chain."

It was evening now and a coolness sifted itself over them as they sat on her front porch. "Then it was Mrs. Wienowski's body?"

"No doubt about it. With the bones in her throat crushed where he strangled her."

Mary shivered. "Poor woman."

"Henry was pretty clever at that. If you can ever call a murderer clever. He killed her and put her body in the freezer locker just like you figured. Then he sat back and laughed while we tore up the ground out here looking for her. Then he figured the safest place in the world was a place we had already searched. He was right about that too. Or he would have been if you hadn't got trapped in there."

Mary warmed his coffee. "I wonder, though, why he sold the place. You'd think he'd want to stay where he could keep his eye on it."

"You know how that woodshed spooked you, Mary. Maybe it had the same effect on him. And he had no reason to believe anyone would go digging the shed up. Like I say,

if you hadn't got trapped in there—say, how did that happen anyway?"

Mary said slowly, "The wind, I guess. I had the door swung all the way back so it couldn't have closed by itself."

Redfield frowned. "I do a little farming, Mary, so I watch the weather. There wasn't enough wind today to move the wheat, let alone a heavy door."

"I know," she said softly.

In the morning she went out to the woodshed to see how well Redfield's men had filled in the hole they had made in exhuming poor Mrs. Wienowski's body. They had leveled it and tramped the dirt back down so that it looked as it had looked before. Inside it was cool and faintly musty—and nothing more.

It felt exactly as a woodshed should feel . . .

A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

The Union News Company, Garfield News Company and ABC Vending Corporation have announced that they will not accept ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE distributed for sale at THEIR newsstands in the subways, and in certain rail, air and bus terminals throughout the United States.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUTHOR: **ROBERT WALLSTEN**

TITLE: ***The Children of Alda Nuova***

TYPE: Crime and Suspense

LOCALE: Italy

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Frankie Filippo was hiding out in his father's native country. He was bored, jumpy, restless. He had to do something to keep from going nuts. So he visited an ancient ruin . . . a distinguished story.*

MR. FRANKIE FILIPPO, IN THE bright green Fiat 600 he had hired in Rome under another name, was driving slowly—too slowly—along the reclaimed expanse of the Pontine Marshes. His glance flicked from windshield to rear-view mirror. Cops? None. No other car, not even a cart. Empty under the August sun, the flat fields stretched inland to the mountains.

He squinted at their peaks, where the little villages hung. It would be one of those. Chuckling without mirth, he reflected that this was what he had to settle for in the way of entertainment now. He drove on, looking for the road to the left.

"You get so you gotta talk to somebody . . ." That was how the conversation had started a week

ago—he himself had started it—and this, today, was the result. Sightseeing off the beaten track! Well, he'd asked for it.

"Avoid crowds," he had cautioned himself. "Keep to the side streets, don't talk to nobody." But how long could you keep that up? Safe thus far, he had been goaded to take chances with his luck by the sheer unfamiliarity of being alone. It was a Sunday afternoon, and sunny. All the tourists were out, of course, and he knew he should avoid tourists like death, other Americans who might have seen his photograph. But there was an empty table under a striped umbrella at the *caffe* on the Veneto, and—hell, why not behave like a human being for a change?

Ainsley Crowder had been the fellow's name—neat capital letters on the frame of the chiffonier back at the hotel—a long drink of water with heavy-rimmed eyeglasses, sitting alone at the next table. Easy enough to catch his eye, to say an unimportant word or two, and Ainsley Crowder—possibly starved for conversation himself—proved ready enough to talk, with an accent that meant class to Frankie Filippo. And it turned out he knew Rome like a book, or better than a book; he had lived there for three years, knew history, art, archeology, the works.

"See!" Frankie Filippo crowed. "See what I mean? You never know when you meet somebody!" He hunched over the table and lowered his voice. "Do you believe in accidents? I don't. There's always a reason why things happen, like me sitting down here and talking to you. Sometimes you can't make out the reason till later, sometimes you never make it out. Things are arranged, whether you believe it or not." Almost chatty, he sounded to himself, his tongue eager from long disuse. "Like right now—you could help me."

Ainsley Crowder's eyes through the glasses made him look like a polite fish. "How?"

"To fill in the time." No mention, of course, of why. "You gotta do something to keep from going nuts." He checked himself: he was surely going nuts already if he was

going to let himself talk like that! "Gotta sort of mark time here, see, just for a little while."

Ainsley Crowder didn't seem to care. He asked no questions, smiled, nodded; he mentioned places to visit, the glories of Rome.

"I seen the Colosseum," Frankie said. "I seen the Vatican. What else? But without crowds. See, I hate crowds. Somewheres to go by myself, somewheres quiet, in the country maybe."

So Ainsley Crowder wrote the list on the reverse of his card—Hadrian's Villa, Palestrina, Viterbo, Tarquinia—and Frankie Filippo, dogged, bored, drove day after day, one day to a place; took a look-see, flat-eyed, at the shabby remnants of a hundred pasts; checked them off—*there, that was done*—and time was filled in. Soon, maybe, they'd be off his back and he could move freely again, not jump at every sound around him.

Now he saw the sign and turned left toward the mountains. *ALDA ANTICA, 14 km.* ("This ought to appease your appetite for obscurity," Ainsley Crowder had said as he wrote the name near the bottom of the card. "It's just a dot on the largest map—a footnote in a history book. A ruin, abandoned nearly a hundred years before Christ. But its ancient wall has something of a reputation among students, and nearby stands a modern, or at least inhabited, village called Alda Nuova.")

Frankie began to climb on a winding road that ran along the face of the mountain, then doubled back on itself, but each time a little higher. Second gear whined in the stillness, and there was nobody to be seen, neither man nor animal. Above and below, the mountain stretched, tawny in the sun, dotted with twisted olive trees. Like in a kind of a nightmare, Frankie Filippo thought.

("Let me remind you," Ainsley Crowder had said, "you mustn't expect the easy-going charm of the rest of Italy. These are mountain people, a race apart—inbred, undernourished, desperately poor. You'll be less than two hours from Rome, but at Alda Nuova the calendar turns back. The present is the Dark Ages.")

Frankie Filippo stopped abruptly and peered at the sun-baked mountain. Maybe this was a spot to skip. It looked innocent enough; yet a sound that was not quite a voice, a prickling at the back of his neck that was not quite a sensation, seemed to warn him. Then he snorted. Italy was getting him down. No wonder his father had left it. *You managed in the States, didn't you? You managed good, so don't let Italy scare you.*

The ancient walled city hung on the cliff-edge above him. He turned for the last time, climbed steeply, entered through a narrow ruined gate, and found himself in the middle of a square. Behind him some-

one shouted. He stepped hard on the brake as a crone scuttled to an archway, dragging a table and chair. A shop, a bean shop, right in the middle of the square—and Frankie Filippo smiled thinly at her terror, her hostile stare, her goiter and gray mustache. A cripple lay stretched in the sun next to the village pump; he cackled without teeth, malice glittering in his eyes. Frankie Filippo spat.

So this was Alda Nuova—New Alda—new five hundred years ago. The village sprawled over the mountain top; alleys and flights of stairs ran crazily down both sides; spavined, windowless houses huddled, their only air and light coming through the open doors. Frankie Filippo had known squalor in his childhood, but that had been American squalor and couldn't touch this. Places did something to you, Frankie knew. Places warned you—if you let them, if you listened.

"Turista? Turista?"

He turned at the curiously husky voice. At elbow level he saw a grinning face, a monkey face, and flung up his arm. The boy dodged, merry-eyed. He stood less than four feet tall.

"You have come to see Alda Antica," he said in a dialect that was all but incomprehensible. "I will be your guide. I and my friends—" And before he had finished speaking, the car was surrounded by boys of the same age and size—but

where had they come from?—shoving, waving, shouting as they grabbed at the door to open it and get in back.

"Wait!" Frankie Filippo's Italian was unsure, improvised from remembered scraps, but the voice that had rung out in back rooms and empty lots—unused since his arrival in Italy—cowed them to silence. "Three of you only." He pointed to the first boy. "You and two others." Kids he could cope with; he decided to pay no attention to the warning of the place.

They clambered in and gave directions. Paolo, Giulio, Gino, they said their names were, then chattered to each other. I don't like them behind me, Frankie Filippo thought.

He drove slowly past dark doorways, hostile faces, misshapen bodies (inbred, Ainsley Crowder had said.) Then he was on a narrow road that ran along the ridge. Across the plain below, he saw the distant glitter of the sea; on his right, the mountains melted, fold after fold, into the hot sky. When Paolo pointed, he turned off and jolted down ruts, half buried in weeds, to a low clearing and a wooden fence.

"Stop."

Above him on a knoll loomed the Cyclopean wall, built for permanence out of rectangles and polygons of rough stone, some nine or ten feet long. It curved away on both sides, like arms em-

bracing the abandoned city. ("The Sixth Century before Christ," Ainsley Crowder's voice came back to him. "It was once thought the work of giants . . .")

Frankie Filippo looked and mopped his forehead. He reached into his breast pocket for his sunglasses just as the whole army of boys from the square, with reinforcements, came shouting and running over the brow of the hill. Twelve—thirteen—fourteen, he counted; and then a new one appeared, and not a boy.

He shambled tall among them, his features distorted by the effort of keeping up with the others.

"Who's that?"

"Cesare," Paolo said. "The brother of my brother's wife. Do not worry, he is a good man. He will watch the automobile."

Frankie Filippo stiffened. "Watch the automobile? Why?" Repugnance rose in his throat as Cesare—out of breath, bent, bobbing with vacant amiability—took up a position to guard the car. Like that kid on the block, the gimpy one with the stammer. People felt sorry for him, even Frankie's own Mama, but Frankie had always hated him. He remembered the night by the tracks, that sudden feeling of power, of happiness in his chest; his knuckles bleeding, and the gimpy kid sprawled on the gravel like asleep, open-mouthed to the sky.

"Come." Little Paolo was point-

ing to the wall. "The gate is around the bend."

"Now wait—wait—" Frankie had had enough. The undecipherable malignity of the place had made itself felt again, and he wanted to leave. But the youngsters were waiting, and it would take more Italian than he knew to explain to them why.

"Okay," he said, and with Paolo in the lead they started up the incline through the tall grass to the wall. Like any group of boys they pushed, slapped, laughed, shouted, chased one another; yet there was a difference that made Frankie Filippo feel nervous. Was it their husky voices? Was it that whenever he turned abruptly he found one of them staring at him?

Kids, after all, he said to himself. Take it easy. But then he remembered something he had heard. "Enough butterflies can kill a man." It had stuck in some crevice of his mind, an image of suffocation under a million powdered wings.

Now they had walked through the remains of Alda's great gate and Frankie Filippo found himself unprepared for what he saw—a stretch of empty yellow hillside and, jagged against the hot sky, the girdle of ancient stones, complete except for a tract on the side facing the sea, where its line was continued by a fringe of scrub trees. Nothing else—a slanted field, and silence.

Paolo danced ahead. "Look—there stood a temple—and there another . . ."

Well, maybe, Frankie thought. A gray, ivy-grown cylinder lay on its side; under the weeds you could make out a rectangle of scarred pavement. Frankie was pretending to be interested for the benefit of his escorts, but he could not have told why he felt it necessary to do so. On the way from one site to another he tripped and stumbled. Instantly Paolo was at his side, supporting him.

"It's all right, kid. Thanks." But patting the boy's shoulder, he drew his hand back in surprise. It was like touching granite.

"Wait a minute. How old are you, Paolo?"

"Fourteen."

Frankie smiled. "And you others?" Eleven, twelve at the most, he would have sworn.

"Fourteen—fifteen—fourteen—" they shouted.

"I don't believe you."

"It is true," Paolo said. "We are all little here in Alda."

But not weak, Frankie Filippo thought; tough and strong. Not really kids after all. Ainsley Crowder's words flashed through his mind . . . "undernourished . . . desperately poor . . ." He asked Paolo about the blizzards of the previous winter.

"For five weeks," the boy said, "nobody could go down the mountain or come up. Snow fell every

day. My little sister died of the cold—" he pointed at one of his friends—"and his brother. Food? None for weeks. Lucky if we found a dog or cat. Once my Papa caught a rat and we had a feast ..."

Frankie Filippo felt revulsion, not pity. If you were poor you did something about it. His Papa was poor and went to America, and look at Frankie Filippo now. Well, not now; look at him two months ago, before he'd had to run. The boys—the dwarfed teenagers—stood in a semicircle around him, arms folded, squinting in the sun, listening. Why should they make him so uneasy? Because they were so many? Hell, he could take care of a bunch of undersized fourteen-year-olds. But it seemed to Frankie Filippo that they were looking, not at him, but at his New York suit, his monogrammed shirt, his amethyst cuff links, the diamond in his ring.

So he moved abruptly. "Is this all? Let's go, then."

"Attenzione, signore!"

Paolo's hand kept him from falling again. At his feet was a stone ring, half hidden by grass, with something that looked like the entrance to a small tunnel at its center.

"What is it?"

Palo went into his guide-book spiel. "It has been there since the beginning. It runs through the middle of the mountain and comes

out at its base. There are five of them—" and he indicated them across the field.

"What were they for?"

"When people lived here—to dispose of enemies." Paolo said it lightly; he even made a comic gesture describing it, and a chorus of giggles rose from the others, but Frankie Filippo, while he was privately deciding that the tunnels had probably been used as sewers, felt a certain effort in his answering smile. He ran a finger under the damp rim of his collar and wiped the sweat from where his sunglasses rested against his face. Funny. Whenever a silence fell, something happened in his stomach.

"Look, *signore*."

The boy named Giulio was pointing at the trees that substituted for the crumbled wall. "But be careful. It is very dangerous."

Frankie Filippo didn't care what they had to show him. Something told him that he must make it clear to them that he was not afraid. You could smell fear. Frankie knew that. They must not smell it on him.

So he followed Giulio to the trees with the others behind him, silent. Giulio said, "Look," as he parted the branches, and at the same time Paolo put out a steadying arm. Frankie Filippo drew in his breath and stepped back. It would have been so easy. Too easy. They could have said afterward

that he had fallen. Because beyond the trees there was nothing—nothing but space to the horizon, and below, a ledge and a sheer dizzying drop to the valley.

He smiled and raised his eyebrows to indicate that he was impressed but not afraid. Edging around so that his back was away from the unsubstantial screen of trees, he reached for his cigarettes to reinforce his calm. It was a mistake; or perhaps something of the sort would have happened later anyhow.

A shout went up. "*Sigarette! Sigarette!*" Filthy hands grabbed for the packet.

"Hey, wait—" He tried to hold it out of reach. They crowded forward; one of them jumped; the packet fell to the ground; they scrambled, fighting each other out of the way.

"Watch it," said Frankie Filippo, and reached down himself. Somebody pawed at the packet, rolled it away from him. "Give me those cigarettes!" They laughed.

Then Frankie Filippo thought, What the hell, a lousy pack of cigarettes. Besides, he had more in the car. So he rearranged his face to look benign, as though he had intended to give them the cigarettes all along. Now, he thought. Get to the car and beat it out of here.

Once outside the wall he would be safe. If there was going to be trouble, people might hear and come to help him. He started slow-

ly across the grass toward the gate. But the semicircle moved with him, except for a few boys left behind, quarreling about the division of the cigarettes. And when he reached the gate there was Cesare, the guardian of the car, knees bent, shoulders out of line, a questioning look on his face. Or was it part of a plan that Cesare should be posted there to block his way?

"*Signore*—" It was Paolo, close behind him, innocent and grave-eyed, his hand outstretched. "A little money . . . ?"

A question? A demand?

Another boy came forward. "We are poor. We are hungry."

Now they were like a chorus that had heard its cue. "A little money . . . a few coins . . ."

"Wait—wait till I get to the car."

The tacit promise held them, though they were no less close around him as he went through the gate down the slope. He opened the door of the car. Old stuff, this was. Put them off their guard.

"The money . . ." they said, "the money . . ."

Fifteen kids and one man. Frankie Filippo wanted to smile. Wait till he saw Ainsley Crowder again and thanked him for his advice. He turned; it was a simple gesture. You stepped down hard on the instep of the nearest boy. The switchblade clicked into place as you withdrew it from your pocket. You swung it upward—and there was Cesare, the half-wit,

moaning on the gravel, his hands to his stomach (like that other time by the railroad tracks) and the boys, defensive, outraged, shouted, "No! No!"

But those were the only sounds. As he put one foot inside the car, he had a moment's image of all their faces. Wolf faces. Youth drained out of them now; their eyes became hard, wary, narrowed. They were more expert than Frankie Filippo would have guessed. Hands on his shoulder, hands clawing his arm, hands beating down the other arm that clung to the door. He saw the switchblade glisten as it fell, and glisten again as one of them recovered it.

After he let go the car, they didn't pull him any more. They drove him. He stumbled backward up the slope again, there being no other place to go, no other side unguarded.

"What do you want? Tell me. What do you want?"

Now he was through the gate, now on the other side of the wall, and it was as if a door had shut. He tripped, righted himself, wiped sweat out of his eyes, and lurched through the grass to the center of the field, avoiding one of the holes that tunneled through to the base of the mountain.

But they were around him. He could see it was only a matter of time, and they were taking it because they had plenty. They had the switchblade now, and the ad-

vantage of number, and he was the stranger here.

Little by little the circle was narrowing.

He had only himself to thank for this; it had been he who wanted advice from Ainsley Crowder. This was what you got for having to talk to somebody. This was where you landed for shooting off your mouth.

He called out to them. "Look—you want money?" He reached into his change pocket, scattered coins like bounty, sowing them like seed. But not one eye was distracted, and now he brought out the wadded bills, the five- and ten-thousand *lire* notes. "Here, here's money, here's all the money you want—" He tried to stop the trembling of his fingers as he peeled the notes, one by one, and tossed them into the air; where they floated and skittered to the grass, like leaves in the fall, he thought—or butterflies.

Butterflies! For a moment, even the sun was flutteringly eclipsed by the wings in his mind. When the air cleared again, and all the bills had settled on the grass, he saw that not one boy had stooped to pick them up. That would come later.

"Take it," he insisted. "Take it!" he begged. "Take it, it's all for you!"—a fortune the like of which none of them could ever have seen. But the real fortune, the American money, he kept hidden in the secret compartment of his wallet. There

were limits to generosity, and it was hard, even at this moment, to break his long habit of saving against a rainy day.

He shouted. "*Aiuto!*" "Help!"—but with no idea that anyone would hear him, or hearing, would care. His voice echoed faintly as it reverberated across the field, against the wall.

Then silence, and the blazing sun—and the circle getting smaller . . .

It was three weeks before another car with Roman license plates—this time with two occupants—whined and twisted up the mountainside to Alda.

"We're nearly at the bottom of the list," said Ainsley Crowder, and his companion, at the wheel, nodded. He was Siani of the Office for Foreigners at the Questura, assigned to the case of the vanished Italo-American after almost simultaneous inquiries from the missing man's hotel, an automobile renting company, and the American Department of State. Siani had got in touch with Ainsley Crowder after finding Crowder's card between the mirror and the frame of the chiffonier in the empty hotel room, and had been pleased to discover that Ainsley Crowder's memory—for details of conversation and appearance—was precise and vivid.

Together they had visited all the places listed on the back of the card: Hadrian's Villa, Palestrina,

Viterbo, Tarquinia. They had found traces: some remembered the green Fiat, others the man who drove it, the dark face, the bright clothes, the quiet, sneering manner. But no one had any idea of what had happened to him.

Nor had the people of Alda Nuova when they were questioned. Immediately on entering through the ruined medieval gate, their car was surrounded by a mob of shouting boys who offered their services as guides to the ruins of Alda Antica. At first Siani ignored the youngsters and talked to the malevolent-looking old woman who sold beans at a table in the middle of the square and who said she knew nothing.

Then Siani tried the toothless laughing man who lay in the sun near the village pump, but he neither understood nor was understandable. Finally, with the boys as escorts, they visited the empty field ringed by the massive ancient wall, were shown the sites of vanished temples and the oubliettes that tunneled through the inside of the mountain to its base.

Ainsley Crowder observed that the police officer seemed less interested in these than in details of the boys' attire. He even asked them how, in a village known to have suffered severely in the previous winter's blizzards, they managed to have new shoes, new jackets, new sweaters. The boys shrugged. They had ready answers. "My Papa

bought them for me." "My brother works in another village and brought them home . . ." Their eyes were of such innocence and truthfulness that you could not disbelieve them.

A little later Ainsley Crowder wandered, for no particular reason, toward the clump of scrub trees that screened the seaward side of the ancient city in place of the wall that had crumbled there. "*Attenzione, signore!*" the boys called in their oddly grown-up voices. "Look here—the base of another temple . . ." But he sensed that they were trying to distract him and therefore walked on till he found himself on the edge of nothing. He started, tried to control it, hoped they had not noticed—though he was well aware that they were watching him—because, looking down to the ledge below, he had seen a dump heap piled with the charred remains of some kind of car. At one corner, where the fire had not completely done its work, lay what looked like a bright green door.

Turning, he found Siani immediately behind him, and when he would have spoken, there was an all but imperceptible nod and a waggle of the finger that meant, "Say nothing."

Afterward they walked around the new village again, talking casually, questioning indirectly. Nobody, of course, knew anything. Nobody had seen the car that Siani

described, nor the man. They said it was a long time since any visitor had come. Ainsley Crowder was not sure if he was imagining it, but behind all their professions of ignorance he sensed a hint of mockery—as if, after his and Siani's backs were turned, there might be a quiet exchange of smiles.

A moment later, climbing one of the crumbled stairways to the village square, he was frightened.

"Look—"

But Siani, with motionless lips, said, "Not now."

Ainsley Crowder had seen, in a girl's ears, two amethysts that might have once been cuff links. On a woman's finger he had seen a diamond ring.

They got into the car under the stares of the villagers.

Siani exhaled. "Yes. It is now clear what happened. In Rome I shall write a report for the interested parties. But how can anyone prosecute a whole village?"

The car started slowly down the hill. "Do you remember, in our first interview, when you were telling me about your conversation with Signor Filippo at the *caffè*, you said you had found his face somewhat familiar?"

"It was only an impression."

"One that might have been stronger, perhaps, if you had been in the United States—or seen American publications—more recently than you have. You see, Frankie Filippo left New York in

a hurry. The authorities were after him. He was running away."

"He was a criminal?"

Siani nodded.

"A murderer?"

Siani took a hairpin curve with care. "Perhaps, but incidentally. He was the chief of a group that sold narcotics to a special class of buyer."

Ainsley Crowder waited. The car had reached level ground now.

He looked back at the great gray walls of the ancient village at the top of the mountain.

"To what class of buyer?" he said.

"To children," Siani answered. "High school children."

And the car started across the reclaimed marshes to the main road that would take them back to Rome.

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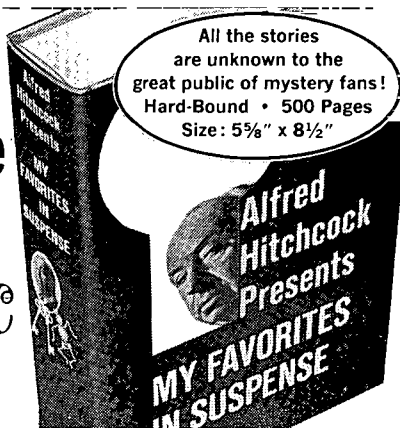
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